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Identity and Conflict in Cultural and Geo-Political Contexts (Part II)

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Identity and Not Identification: Arriving at the Infinite Point Where Not-to-Be Is to Be

Abstract: Central to this paper are two concepts: one is “being” and another “identity.” Both concepts are intertwined in the personhood of the person; but, from a specific perspective that this paper espouses, “being” is viewed as absence since we cannot locate it in the present, except in its state of non-being (with the future always already moving into the past before ‘I’ can fully experience it in the present), whereas identity is constructed through the consciousness of being (that there is in fact an ‘I’ that knows itself as ‘I’ in the historical present); identity is viewed as “present” and a product of society and circumstances. This paper argues that all notions of identity made outside a notion of “being” or “absence”—I use them interchangeably because I cannot think of a moment in which I am in the present and which has simply moved on to become my past—result in a politics of resentment; genuine struggles descend into extremism and their concerns are restricted to narrower terms of identification rather than a more accommodative and inclusive notion of identity. The politics of identity must confront its limitations in the quest for absoluteness, because of the tendency to arrive logically and prescriptively towards a monolithic understanding of reality where the historical present, as in the position I occupy in the political historical context, is privileged over the fact that the “present” is never really the present but the past or the future. No identity is possible without an insight into the presence of another being (which is possible when I view my own present as a passing one) within the field in which one exists as a self. In other words, I am entitled to assert my selfhood, like in attempting to preserve my self-respect. I cannot fix the event in the absolute present, but must look at it as an attempt to engage in dialogue with another being outside the “self” that is simultaneously both ‘I’ and ‘me’ as far as my physical and psychological needs are concerned.

Keywords: being, identity, infinity, globalization, extremism

Motto: “So also I thought about thee, O Life of my life, as stretched out through infinite space, interpenetrating the whole mass of the world, reaching out beyond in all directions, to immensity without end; so that the earth should have thee, the heaven have thee, all things have thee, and all of them be limited in thee, while thou art placed nowhere at all” (Saint Augustine, Book Seven *Confessions*).

Motto: “Nature is an infinite sphere whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere” (Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*).

Introduction: God, Nature and the Human Person:

To Saint Augustine, God is everywhere and simultaneously nowhere—a reality greater than time or space and yet *all things have thee* (Augustine 135). Teske in *Paradoxes of Time in Saint Augustine* points out that Saint Augustine was the first Christian thinker in the West “to articulate with clarity the concept of divine eternity as timeless, as being all at once without past or future” (57). The *present* in Augustine is something like the black hole of the cosmos that can absorb time as memory or desire into a state of

timelessness; the being of God is identified in this state that is neither past nor future. Timelessness is not the absence of time as much as it is no-time at all. The poem "Even Such is Time," by Walter Raleigh, opens with the lines: "Even such is time, that takes in trust/ Our youth, our joys, our all we have,/ And pays us but with earth and dust." Milton begins his sonnet with the lines: "How soon hath Time, the subtle thief of youth, / Stol'n on his wing my three-and-twentieth year!" In both instances, time is a reality, but an absent one. In the former case, it is a betrayer of trust because it does not meet our expectations and instead "pays us but with earth and dust," and in the latter it is a "subtle thief" not of age but of youth. Both poets are mourning the absence of time. To conceive of time as absence is to imagine time as not being present. The line: "I wish I had the time" is in a way a consciousness of the absence.

The timelessness in which God exists is not about time as an absence; it is about time not being there at all. The lack, the loss or the absence is recognition of the evanescent nature of human experience. It is also indication of the fact that something existed in the past for it not to be present here and now. That, however, is not the case with God whose eternal presence defines in essence what timelessness *is*. As Teske notes: "The first paradox arises from the skeptical question about what God was doing before he made heaven and earth. Augustine's answer could hardly be more paradoxical; he said that there was no time when God did nothing, since there was no time before God created heaven and earth" (Teske 1).

That's what makes the latter a state of void outside time "when God did nothing," or spreading across time, when one feels betrayed that time has passed without one's noticing it.

In some way, Pascal is paraphrasing Saint Augustine when he attributes to Nature the quality of being everywhere and nowhere—he gives Nature the image of an *infinite sphere* to make his point (Pascal 11). A sphere is infinite because we cannot locate a beginning or an ending. The paradox of something without a beginning or an ending applies to nature as much as to God because it defies all attempts to be logically comprehended. Pascal renders insignificant the distinction between the center and the circumference simply by making "everywhere" synonymous with "nowhere" in the context of the statement. To say that air is everywhere is also to say that it is nowhere in particular. The paradox lies in the sense of the statement rather than in its grammatical correctness. While examining the sense of the statement, it would be unreasonable to rely upon logic because nature as "infinite sphere" and God as "infinite space," both defy logical comprehension. How does one consciously make sense of a sphere or space that is infinite! At some level both are rhetorical statements because they are emphasizing the fact that nature and God are beyond human finitude. The precondition for the statement is faith in the infinity of both nature and God. Since both nature and God are outside the scope of reason, they enter the domain of faith—which is the realm of being or absence. As human persons, we participate in that eternal present where we experience infinity. When Blake speaks of holding "Infinity in the palm of your hand/ And Eternity in an hour," he is speaking of an intense awareness of that almost non-existent present that stands before the future has occurred and beyond the realm of the past. Though it is a timeless moment, that's where we *are* in that absence before we move into the past or await for the future. We experience a momentary lapse of reason at the precise point we experience the infinity of nature and God.

In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas says: "It is not the insufficiency of the I that prevents totalization, but the Infinity of the Other" (Levinas 80). Somewhere the haunting notion of the infinite as outside oneself—as not-I—is used as the basis of an identity which cannot be identified. To identify is to reduce something to finitude simply because one loses one's sense of selfhood in the context of the infinite. Identity relies on fixing time within the grammatical framework of language to enable the functioning of day-to-day life. I cannot continue to be myself once I recognize the infinity of what is other-than-myself. Whether the God of Augustine, the Nature of Pascal or the Other of Levinas, there is an infinite point, an almost-absence that is in and outside of time, where not-to-be is what being *is*. Like God and nature, the personhood of the human person refuses to be reduced to the finitude of social frameworks which necessarily rely on identity for practical reasons. Any attempts at identification are smashed to bits and human languages will

necessarily miss the point where the person can be identified. The politics of identification is about consciously disallowing the notion of the timeless present from entering into everyday or historical time. The latter relies on memory and the reconstruction of events in order to enable the possession of a meaningful past.

My argument revolves around the paradox that *to be* is to be absent, whereas identity is about presence and visibility. Where identity becomes an end in itself, the result is *identification* and a politics of chauvinism; identification is the face of identity where pre-given notions determine what a person *is*. A photograph in a police file is the best example of identification. It restricts the possibilities of any further definition. The spaces of personhood are in a sense closed. The person is isolated from his or her beingness. The flux of absences, the non-being where I am a person thrown between the past and the future, defined and redefined in the cauldron of the eternal present—any sort of *identification* deprives me of my sense of “infinity.” The creative space of being is lost to a definition of who I am or what I could possibly be. If I *am* only in the infinitely minuscule space that I call the present, it is so simply because it breaks the limits placed by identity which is something that exists in my memory and reminds me each moment of my conscious life of who I am. I cannot, however, restrict who I am to either memory or hope that is in the future. It is the present where I really am that creates and recreates identities for me. My being in that present is a fertile and perennial source enabling me to think and feel my self as an infinite other to myself.

Thus, John of Gaunt in Shakespeare’s *Richard the II* will speak of himself in terms of being “gaunt” punning on his “leanness” and “age.”

O how that name befits my composition!
 Old Gaunt indeed, and gaunt in being old:
 Within me grief hath kept a tedious fast;
 And who abstains from meat that is not gaunt?
 For sleeping England long time have I watch’d;
 Watching breeds leanness, leanness is all gaunt:
 The pleasure that some fathers feed upon,
 Is my strict fast; I mean, my children’s looks;
 And therein fasting, hast thou made me gaunt:
 Gaunt am I for the grave, gaunt as a grave,
 Whose hollow womb inherits nought but bones (Shakespeare, *Richard the II*, II. I).

Shakespeare problematizes how we speak about identity and reveals to us its fictional or constructed character. Is gaunt then a noun, an adjective or a verb? John of Gaunt in the above lines is talking about his condition and he uses his name, the place of his birth being Ghent. Gaunt then is the name of a place associated with another proper noun, John. Is it possible to separate the name of the person from that of the place when we talk about one and the same being? The ambivalence and ambiguity that surrounds how one thinks about oneself is captured through the word-play. Thus, ‘gaunt’ as a word will be an absence that is open to multiple interpretations. Hence, John of Gaunt will say: “O, how that name befits my composition!” while referring to his condition. Identity therefore can never exist in an “in-itself” situation, but is always already in need of an other. When one *is* as in being in the present, one experiences a sense of unity with the world around. In a state of identity, one knows oneself through language. There is no human language in which one understands or knows oneself without *being* in a state of otherness. Such a sense of being implies that “I” exist in a relation to another person as if that other person were paradoxically more “me” than myself.

In one of his last interviews, the filmmaker Tarkovsky says: "Man's only specificity is his feeling of dependence, this freedom that he gives himself to feel dependent. This sensation is the path of spirituality. Man's luck consists in ceaselessly developing the path leading to spirituality" (Gianvito 170).

The idea of freedom as complete autonomy is an illusion. What we call freedom has to emerge from the awareness that there is another being present in the vicinity of where I belong or where I wish to be. The "spirituality" that Tarkovsky is talking about is one where the human person is dependent on a creator.

Dependence is man's only chance, since this faith in the Creator, this humble awareness that one is only the creature of a superior being, this belief has the power to save the world. One must fill one's life with servitude. This relationship is very simple: it resembles the one that unites children to a parent. One must recognize the authority of the other. It is this respect, this servitude, that gives man the strength to look inside himself, that furnishes him with his introspective, contemplative look. (Gianvito 170)

Tarkovsky's understanding of spirituality is directed towards "a superior being" because it gives one the humility of being part of a whole rather than be a whole entity that need not recognize the existence of a world independent of oneself. The notion of a spiritual dependence on the idea of a creator complements what we call dependence on other beings around us. In more than some sense, the dependence defines our freedom to be ourselves. In the absence of such an insight into the nature of dependence, we are victims of an illusory sense of being able to choose our life without any need to acknowledge those around us.

The question of asserting one's freedom as a way of preserving identity operates at the level of a seeming paradox, because I can be myself only to the extent that I know how much I depend on you. An overemphasis on identity which inevitably degenerates into the politics of identification is violent because it does not have otherness to it. Identity relies on the construction of the past through memory, while a sense of otherness emerges from my knowledge of myself through the eternal present in which I can only be an other person that is not relying on memory to give me a sense of beingness. Identity makes demands that prevent me from engaging with the flux of otherness which comes from my sense of being. Notions of human dignity that are essentially rooted in identity enable individuals to assert their presence as social persons. In identification, the idea of a "collective" body merges with the individual leaving no space for otherness. Self-interest and opportunism get confused with collective good or some such recipe meant for the welfare of all the members of a social group where the world exists only in black and/or white terms.

Whether such identification is rooted in race, caste, religion or nation—it indubitably needs *enemies*—both real and imaginary or a combination—to sustain it. It thus degenerates into finitude. Time is not the issue, but how we envision time. Time that is reduced to possession does not have the *divine eternity* that Saint Augustine was talking about. Infinity is a physical thing in how we see pain and joy as being *forever* in some sense. More importantly, infinity is the time and space that we open to the worlds of others around us. The main point is that identities constructed on a notion of being are willing to negotiate possibilities of dialogue at various levels. Identities without a sense of being make it impossible to provide space for the other. Therefore, the *identification*.

The history of being is a history of the absence, whereas the history of identity is the history of the truth of being. Heidegger's view is that: "The being of Da-sein finds its meaning in temporality. But temporality is at the same time the condition of the possibility of historicity as a temporal mode of being of Da-sein itself, regardless of whether and how it is a being *in time*" (Stassen 49).

Identity is essential to the extent that it has historicity to it. Heidegger sees *temporality* as the basis of *historicity*. Time is a product of history; death is universal, but an understanding of death is cultural and shaped by the forces of a particular time-frame in history. While identity comes from history, being has a puzzling, ahistorical quality to it. It is one's sense of universality with respect to the world around us. It is

God, Nature, time and the human person, all at once present and absent, *everywhere and nowhere*. In his "Letter on Humanism," Heidegger notes that "the human being is the shepherd of being." I would not overstate the ahistoricity of being outside the "human being" except to reinforce the point that all historical questions are at heart rooted in an absence; the emptiness of being through the experience of the timeless present. It is the destiny of the human being to play the role of iterating being. I cannot know my death except through the life I have lived as a person which perhaps my neighbors or my neighborhood is entitled to comment upon rather than me alone. What I could, however, possibly be certain of, is that the universe exists in my absence because there is proof of life before I was born which is most likely to be the case after I am gone. The absence is central to my experience of the time given to me. It is a historical absence because I know it through the historical context in which I articulate my personhood. It is ahistorical to the extent that any understanding of history would be meaningless without acknowledging the presence of the absence. Borges' parable on Shakespeare "Everything and Nothing" plays on the absence, giving it an air of metaphysics, opening with the lines:

There was no one in him; behind his face (which even through the bad paintings of those times resembles no other) and his words, which were copious, fantastic and stormy, there was only a bit of coldness, a dream dreamt by no one. At first he thought that all people were like him, but the astonishment of a friend to whom he had begun to speak of this emptiness showed him his error and made him feel always that an individual should not differ in outward appearance.

The Shakespeare condemned to be conscious of his emptiness is pursued by the same "ahistorical" sense of an absence greater than his presence to produce characters through his creative genius, so much so that at the end of the parable upon encountering God, he must ask of him the question related to his fundamental isolation: "History adds that before or after dying he found himself in the presence of God and told Him: 'I who have been so many men in vain want to be one and myself.'" That is one thing Shakespeare is destined never to be: being himself. The infinity of otherness he must explore through the countless characters invented in his dramas owing to the terrible consciousness of an absence surpassing history itself.

In the poem *To His Coy Mistress*, Andrew Marvell brilliantly parodies the notion of temporality that omits the experiential side of living. Time is the *experience* of temporality. Time cannot be understood devoid of experience. Hence the beginning lines of the poem: "Had we but world enough, and time, / This coyness, lady, were no crime. / We would sit down and think which way / To walk, and pass our long love's day." The mistress might, however, have a point in her coyness. She wants her otherness to be recognized not in terms of identity, but in terms of being. Being is constructed around a notion of time, though any notion of time is meaningless without the infinite in view. The mistress wants her otherness to be recognized and that is something that goes beyond temporality.

Identity has its roots in being. In the *absence* of being, the politics of identity can be unnervingly self-centered. Being is other-centered. To be is to be *infinite*. While the flux of being is a source of difference, identity is restricted by parameters imposed through notions of the self. In *Parmenides*, Heidegger mentions: "To think is to heed the essential... The character of essential knowing is entirely different. It concerns the being in its ground—it intends Being. Essential *knowing* does not lord it over what it knows but is solicitous toward it" (Heidegger 3).

Knowing must at all times be *solicitous* toward Being and not *lord it over*. The humility of knowing is in *intending* Being. Knowledge that roots itself in being does not descend into the realm of simple generalizations or stereotyping. Identity that does not take being into consideration enters the politics of identification, which manifests itself in some of the worst kinds of ethnic nationalism. In letting being be, one comes to terms with the fact that any extreme position is built around a predictably static view of human nature. The human being, far from being a "shepherd" of being, ends up becoming a wolf

consuming the resources of nature without respect for the rights of other beings, by not letting nature be itself, or, for that matter, others be themselves.

Globalization, Identity Crises and the Rise of Extremism

Globalization simultaneously pushes the working classes into a corner and uses ethnicity as one of its bases to create the model consumer tailored to suit the requirements of a particular social order. The alienated working classes who do not fit into patterns of consumption are in a situation where extremism seems a likely alternative. Extremism needs a social base that ethnicity provides it with. Ethnic nationalism, which by its very nature is exclusive, embraces extremism because it suits its agenda only too well. The unethical dimension of ethnicity-based identities reveals itself in the language of extremism. Reactionary politics is disguised through the use of radical language. The genocides of history are evidence that violence and nationalism feed into each other—both of which are reinforced in discourses on globalization.

Orwell's classical distinction between nationalism and patriotism in *Notes on Nationalism* is useful in many ways.

By *patriotism* I mean devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life, which one believes to be the best in the world but has no wish to force on other people. Patriotism is of its nature defensive, both militarily and culturally. Nationalism, on the other hand, is inseparable from the desire for power. The abiding purpose of every nationalist is to secure more power and more prestige, *not* for himself but for the nation or other unit in which he has chosen to sink his own individuality. (n.p.)

The identity that emerges from patriotism carries a sense of beingness, while the kind of identity that emerges from nationalism is aggressive and demanding. More than that, *militarily* and *culturally*, it imposes itself on others without any respect for their individuality or their way of life. Identification limits the personhood of the other to traits that are *visible* and impossible to contradict because the prejudiced mind does not go by argument, but rather a warped certainty which has doubts and conflicts, but is not willing to confront them. Global market-based economies demand an uncritical belief in the justice of a system where the poor and powerless are left to the whims of the rich and powerful.

The commodity in global markets that alienates the human person and creates a consumer out of him or her needs a reactionary base for it to perpetuate identification. You're *identified* as a user of a particular commodity in the same way that you would be identified based on your ethnicity. These two kinds of identification are strikingly similar. Consumerism is the other face of ethnic nationalism in the era of globalization. Globalization as an ideology of consumption goes hand-in-hand with a technology of control. The more the markets insist on preaching a *gospel* of freedom and individualism, the more does centralization and intrusion into the daily lives of men and women under the pretense of providing security to them becomes a reality. In the penetrating essay "Jihad vs. McWorld," Benjamin R. Barber makes a distinction between "one McWorld tied together by technology, ecology, communications, and commerce" and another Jihad, "a retribalization of large swaths of humankind by war and bloodshed." Both the discourses make demands on the loyalty of individuals in different ways. Both contain within them promises of emotional and spiritual security at the expense of one's individuality. Both are deprived of a sense of otherness that comes from detachment and compassion in allowing the world to function without infusing it with the negative energy that comes from violently asserting one's identity. Both are dangerously poised to destroy what is human in the discourse of humanism and reduce the human to calculable parameters. Thus, Benjamin Barber notes that:

McWorld does manage to look pretty seductive in a world obsessed with Jihad. It delivers peace, prosperity, and relative unity—if at the cost of independence, community, and identity (which is generally based on

difference). The primary political values required by the global market are order and tranquility, and freedom—as in the phrases “free trade,” “free press,” and “free love.” Human rights are needed to a degree, but not citizenship or participation—and no more social justice and equality than are necessary to promote efficient economic production and consumption. Multinational corporations sometimes seem to prefer doing business with local oligarchs, inasmuch as they can take confidence from dealing with the boss on all crucial matters. Despots who slaughter their own populations are no problem, so long as they leave markets in place and refrain from making war on their neighbors (Saddam Hussein’s fatal mistake). In trading partners, predictability is of more value than justice. (n.p.)

The undemocratic nature of either cultivating Jihadi tribal loyalties or a McWorld lifestyle that relies on feel-good factors enabling one to look “clever, classless and free” must be understood in order to combat extremism. Aldous Huxley in the essay *Politics and Religion* makes the point that:

A national industrial system is something so complicated that, if it is to function properly and compete with other national systems, it must be controlled in all its details by a centralized state authority. Even if the intentions of the various centralized state authorities were pacific, which they are not, industrialism would tend of its very nature to transform them into totalitarian governments. When the need for military efficiency is added to the need for industrial efficiency, totalitarianism becomes inevitable. Technological progress, nationalism and war seem to guarantee that the immediate future of the world shall belong to various forms of totalitarianism. (187)

Totalitarianism becomes a fact of life where technology outpaces culture. People have to be socially prepared to accept the responsibility that comes with the power that technology endows them with in order to escape the Jihadi way of thinking or the McWorld dedication to superficiality and anti-intellectualism. New forms of identity—often a reworking of old beliefs packaged as novelty—fill the emotional and spiritual vacuum of societies controlled by a strong centralized state authority. The room for individuality, where a sense of being prevents identity from turning into an object of possession, is conspicuous by its absence. The McWorldism of American commerce and the Jihadism of the ISIS stand in polar opposition to one another, leaving no platform for a middle way where doubt and criticism are given space to confront authoritarianism.

In the face of extreme psychological insecurity combined with the commercialization of the social life, a supernatural recipe as solution is the most marketable of myths, especially so with the perpetuation of modern technology. Suddenly, everyone feels the need to discover that they are more special than their neighbors, that they have a destiny unique to them and that God or the gods either have chosen them to lead the others or at least are willing to condone their worst excesses. The American stand-up comedian George Carlin parodies these excesses in one of his performances.

Religion has actually convinced people that there’s an invisible man living in the sky who watches everything you do, every minute of every day. And the invisible man has a special list of ten things he does not want you to do. And if you do any of these ten things, he has a special place, full of fire and smoke and burning and torture and anguish, where he will send you to live and suffer and burn and choke and scream and cry forever and ever until the end of time! But He loves you. He loves you, and He needs money! He always needs money! He’s all-powerful, all-perfect, all-knowing, and all-wise, somehow just can’t handle money! Religion takes in billions of dollars, they pay no taxes, and they always need a little more.

Capitalist-style exploitation exacerbates the isolation that in turn fuels the need for identification. You feel the need to be identified at the expense of one’s critical faculty that casts honest doubts on such identification. A false feeling of insecurity that results from a lack of one’s own sense of beingness needs an equally false sense of security that ethnic nationalism is only too eager to provide you with—except

that the latter gives the illusion of being *real*. More than religion as a spiritual activity, Carlin is attacking religion as institution in a global capitalist scenario. It is not *being* that is forsaken; but one's sense of who one is that is lost in the wholesale embracing of identification that manifests itself in the brutalization of politics.

Warring the Extremes:

The response to extremism that thrives on identity politics is to insert being as infinity into any discussion on identity. Identity serves the purpose of resistance; but resistance can very easily descend into extremism; resistances rarely have embraced moderation as in the non-violent movement of Mahatma Gandhi and the Civil Rights Movement under Martin Luther King. Movements that acknowledge the infinitude of being suffer wounds, but without the lasting scars that make collective living as traumatic as the experience of the suffering itself. In fact, those movements appeal to notions of innate decency in the face of extreme repression. The advantage of such an appeal is that it empowers the powerless to realize that it is within their scope not to submit or give their consent to their oppressors. As Hardy Merriman notes in "Theory and Dynamics of Nonviolent Action":

Nonviolent action is based on the insight that economic, social, political, and military power ultimately comes from the consent and obedience of the people in society. Simply put, if people do not obey, rulers cannot rule. Power therefore is not inherently fixed and stable, but rather is fragile and can shift according to people's willingness to consent to and obey a ruler. (18)

Resistance that seeks to violently oppose power either will fail to provide an alternative that will reject power altogether or will simply reduce the struggle to one where it is about power and nothing else. All struggles, even if their origins are economic and social, tend to be articulated in the language of identity. More importantly, movements that are conscious of the limitations of identity tend to carry greater respect and legitimacy among common people. The emotional barriers that come in the way of different groups are broken down when the politics of identity does not come in the way of a sincere and honest dialogue between people as individuals. A great part of the success in the anti-apartheid movement was that it recognized the importance of delegitimizing the racist character of the regime in question. Through the process of delegitimizing, it became possible for the movement to successfully isolate the government and force it to seek a solution rather than persist in the problem. Daniel M. Mayton II notes:

The work of antiapartheid leadership like Popo Molefe, Mkhoseli Jack, and Archbishop Desmond Tutu and international boycotts of South African goods took their toll. By the late 1980s many in the South African government realized a shift from apartheid policies and law was eminent. Secret meetings were held between government officials and Nelson Mandela. Mandela was clear in his goal that majority rule was necessary but also asserted that whites could expect to find a place in democratic South Africa. The commitment to "non racialism" created a climate that made for more rapid changes than might have otherwise occurred. Changes happened quickly following Mandela's release from prison in 1990. In four years a fully franchised citizenry elected Nelson Mandela as President of South Africa. After decades, apartheid laws were gone. (24)

While the rule of the majority blacks was inevitable, the fact that the numerically minority whites had to be accommodated was important for the struggle to be meaningful in the best sense of the term. Whether they were able to create the conditions of a genuinely egalitarian society where the misery of the poorest of the poor could be alleviated, is a question that unfortunately got sidelined in the process. However, the fact that the blacks and whites were able to coexist as a social order in itself stands as testimony to the greatness of the struggle that ensured that people could still live together despite the memory of a painful

past. Identity-based struggles have a tendency to be agenda-based oriented towards acquiring material benefits without the expectation of significant alterations in the order itself. Struggles that respect the beingness of a being, that are idealistic to the extent that they ensure there are no contradictions in how we look at individuals, that are based on the realization that real change is about change in attitude and perception, these are the struggles that have more or less accepted that identities are fluid and tentative and any emotional investment beyond a point is counter-productive. Eqbal Ahmad writes about his own feelings of living in the US during the Civil Rights era when racism was embodied at the institutional level:

Change occurs, and when it does it happens very fast. When I arrived for the first time as a student, the United States was living in the spell of racism. There were lynchings in the South. When I went to travel with a Japanese and a Brazilian friend to Memphis, for about four hours, from about 4 p.m. to 8 p.m., we couldn't find a hotel that would admit us because we were colored. One was yellow, one was brown, and one was black. We finally found a space in the ghetto, exactly two years later, we were integrating the lunch counters and hotels. Just ten years later, I would return to Memphis and stay at the Sheraton Hotel. I want to tell you when I got there, I got out of the taxi, and the bellboy who picked up my luggage was white. I was so happy to see that that I tipped him ten dollars, which I could ill afford, when he brought me to my room. After he left, I sat and cried. The change was marvelous. And it took some struggle to bring about that change. We still have a long way to go, but change has occurred. (85-86)

Conclusions

Change is a reality of political and social life especially when we look at struggles dedicated to bringing about a transformation in consciousness. As Eqbal Ahmad says: "We still have a long way to go, but change has occurred." The nature of the means used to fight for the change is as important as the kind of politics that is espoused for the change to become a reality. What comes after the change has happened and how people are willing to look at each other in the process of having to live together is vital to an understanding of what peace is all about. Where there are scars of the past, the healing is impossible because there is no collective forgiveness or acknowledgement of the humanity of the other person. To arrive at that infinite point where not-to-be is *to be* must be one of the goals of a social revolution. Identity is there to stay as long as it does not turn into identification built on fear and collective paranoia that result in stereotyping and justification for extremism.

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Racial Identity and the Influence of the Electronic Medium in Erik Loyer's *Chroma* (2001)

Abstract: This article explores racial identity and experience within the electronic environment. Through a close examination of Erik Loyer's electronic text *Chroma* (2001), chapters 5 and 6, I focus on the self-identification and (self-) representation of African-American people, in particular, within the electronic environment. This essay employs the paradigm of a virtual society called "mnemonos" in order to create a parallel to the real world and comment against the restriction of self-identification of African-American people in the U.S. The present essay will also demonstrate that the electronic medium offers greater freedom for self-identification and self-representation to African-American people. However, it also argues that on occasions the aforementioned freedom can be illusory.

Keywords: Erik Loyer, *Chroma*, African-American, self-identification, mnemonos

Introduction

The present article explores the construction of racial identity within an online virtual environment. This work will also look at the influence the technological medium exerts on the construction of racial identity and the way it affects or alters racial identity formation. Despite the fact that Loyer explores racial identity focusing on three racial groups—white-Americans, Asian-Americans and African-Americans—without taking a clear stance, in the present paper emphasis is placed on African-American people in relation to white-Americans. To be more specific, Erik Loyer, in his digital project *Chroma* (2001), argues that identity is predetermined and ascribed to people by those in power and not by technological advancements per se. Loyer also argues that the new media offer far more possibilities to users with regard to self-identification and the formation of a new racial identity liberated from stereotypical assumptions and preconceptions. However, as is argued in the present article, it is not the technological medium that can change racial identity and efface discrimination, but people themselves who have to take action in order to bring about change.

Racial identity relates to the image people construct for themselves and others. Overall, identity formation is now regarded "as being much more flexible, multidimensional [...] as more open-ended and a lifelong project" (Thurlow et al. 97) as it evolves alongside all the socio-political and cultural changes that take place in society. With regard to the electronic technologies, multiple versions of identity can now be created and constructed as well. Crispin Thurlow, Laura Lengel and Alice Timic, in their book *Computer Mediated Communication: Social Interaction and The Internet* (2004), find that people "have increasingly turned to media as a resource for constructing [their] identities" (98). This is due to the increasing new possibilities the internet medium paves as "it offers ordinary people the *potential* to communicate with vast numbers in a way that before was possible only for the very wealthy and the very powerful" (Thurlow et al. 98, italics in original). As far as the formation of identity is concerned, Michael Omi and Howard A. Winant argue in *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (1994) that "[t]he social sciences have come to reject the biologicistic notions of race" (11).¹ Despite the fact that physicality

¹ Nevertheless, Michael Omi and Howard A. Winant maintain that there are other external factors which contribute to the formation of race. To be more specific, they argue that they "use the term *racial formation*, to refer to the

does not exist in the electronic environment, people have replaced real bodies with invented ones through the use of avatars. Consequently, in the electronic environment, identity is still linked to bodily characteristics, but users are the ones who create and shape their avatars. However, this freedom of choice raises questions with regards to the originality and truthfulness of such an identity, an issue that is going to be discussed further down in the present article. Bodily characteristics can bear racial markers, such as skin color or facial characteristics, but, as Heidi J. Figueroa Sarriera maintains, within the virtual environment “the subject is able to exhibit multiple self-portrayals” (98) which may be misleading as to his or her racial identity. In such a medium, the users are not obliged to adhere to a particular identity type, but they are free to construct a different identity for each one of their interactions due to the lack of the existence of a physical body. Therefore, according to Sarriera’s point, only in the absence of physicality within the virtual environment users are able to form their identity the way they please without any restraints. On the other hand, the internet or the World Wide Web (www) is not a race-free locus and there are various modes of manifesting race and racism. Dara N. Byrne says that “[d]espite the popular claim that the Internet presents the possibility of a raceless space, participation on dedicated sites is growing exponentially” (14). There are web pages and forums dedicated to different race cultures, where people can communicate and discuss via chat platforms.² This serves as another opportunity for self-identification: however, the impersonality of the www environment can also lead to intentional or unintentional misunderstandings. To be more specific, in such an environment an individual has the power to pose as someone else and deceive the people one communicates with. This deception could be a product of one wishing to intentionally deceive others for one’s personal purposes or wishing to become someone other than oneself. People tend to adopt different identities in cases where they are trying to fit into groups they are being excluded from due to their gender, race or age. Therefore, in this sense, an online identity can also be a social construct governed by certain social principles, constraints or parameters. An online identity may not be as authentic and free of stereotypes as one thinks.

As far as racial identity is concerned, there are certain elements that are toned down, while others are highlighted due to their interaction with the technological medium. The impersonality of technology offers new outlets for the development and expression of racial identity. Despite the fact that the laws that specified racial categorization in the U.S. have been revised,³ in the real world, racial identity is still signaled by custom, one’s skin color or physical traits disregarding the place of origin of the individual. Further down in this article it will be demonstrated how people construct certain presuppositions regarding one’s (racial) identity and personality, while expecting others to fulfill the prophecies made in relation to them. Christopher A. Ford, in his article “Administering Identity: The Determination of Race in Race-Conscious Law,” asserts that nowadays U.S. “laws and governmental regulations establish an enormously elaborate system of race-conscious policy, seeking to remedy the ill effects of past discrimination, to break down

process by which social, economic and political forces determine the content and the importance of racial categories, and by which they are in turn shaped by racial meanings” (Omi and Winant 12, italics in original). Therefore, one’s race is not simply determined by one’s external appearance, but by a complex of social, political and economic factors.

² Some examples of such chat platforms are: *BlackPlanet*, which is an African-American community website, or Social Network Site (SNS). These started as dating and job posting platforms but they also provide forums for discussion on political and social issues. Also, *AsianAve* or *Asian Avenue* is a social networking website targeted to the Asian-American community. There are various such platforms for numerous ethnic communities in the U.S. and people employ them in order to exchange social, political and personal opinions and ideas.

³ Here I refer to the “one drop rule” and the racial laws valid prior to 1965 going back to the Jim Crow laws. However, there have been some recent revisions on laws and worker union’s regulations. For a more detailed analysis, see Frymer, “Racism Revised: Courts, Labor Law, and the Institutional Construction of Racial Animus.”

barriers to minority advancement, and to allocate various sorts of social and economic benefits to those made needy by societal prejudice and contempt" (1231-32).

Racial laws have always been modified so as to conform to the social changes that have taken place within the American society. For instance, in the process of America's transformation to a more liberal country, some of the legislations that were modified were those pertaining to issues of race, gender and discrimination. One of the important social changes that took place recently is the insertion of the new media in people's everyday life, workplace and way of communication. Despite the fact that the new media offer new possibilities to users, they also recycle some of the problems that the contemporary American society continues to face. To this end, there are no racial laws governing the virtual environment of the new media. However, this is still a developing field and therefore one cannot be certain that there will not be any racial laws established for the new media environment in the future. In a virtual environment, it is the user the one who defines his or her own race by taking on different identities that either perpetuate or subvert various racial stereotypes or attitudes. According to Michael L. Hect, Mary Jane Collier and Sidney A. Ribeau, "African American ethnic identity is but a part of an individual's overall identity" (39); but it seems to me that one's ethnic identity is of equal importance to one's overall identity. However, this part of one's identity may be "associated with roles, groups, and categories" (Hect et al. 41) which may restrict the individual's self-expression within the electronic medium, as is the case with real-life situations. On the other hand, it is evident that the virtual world is not stereotype-free, as it has been built on the basis of various ideologies emerging from the real world. While the new medium does not put an end to discrimination, it allows its users to assume different identities and explore the varying possibilities that each identity offers, as well as the stereotypical beliefs that are linked with each racial identity.

Technologically-mediated literary writing in general offers new and enhanced possibilities to both writers/artists and readers/viewers. Readers/viewers are called to engage in the action of the text and interact with it. Although interaction and engagement with the electronic text are also offered in an analog textual experience, in the case of the digital text the readers/viewers have the opportunity to engage more vividly in the overall literary experience.⁴ Timothy Binkley asserts that "[d]igital representations not only possess a power to move us borrowed from their analog predecessors, they also contain a *vitality* which enables them to engage us in unique and personal interactive experiences" (108).

The experience of textual interaction is different for each reader/viewer and it depends upon the way each one decodes the text based on personal knowledge and background. In the digital realm, with each "click" the readers/viewers can intervene in the narrative practice and its sequencing of events. The electronic medium opens up the literary practice to new possibilities, as it allows readers to witness how the poem moves and evolves. As regards Loyer's work, there is also the visual and audio element to be taken into account, due to the static and animated images, as well as the sounds it employs. In particular, Jessica Pressman, the only theorist who has written about Loyer's text, asserts that *Chroma* being an electronic text is one of the narratives that "inscribe the visible and capture the kinetics" (193). Pressman's reference to *Chroma's* kinetic quality echoes Charles Olson's views mentioned in his essay "The Projective Verse" (1950), where he talks about "the *kinetics* of the thing" (240, italics in original) placing emphasis on the content rather than the form of a poem. In this case, Olson comments on the energy a poem transmits to the readers. To be more specific, Olson argues that "[a] poem is energy transferred from where the poet got it [...], by way of the poem itself to, all the way over to, the reader" (240). Consequently, the text is considered to be a transmitter of both energy and information from the author to the readers. According to Olson, the poem mediates the poet's/narrator's voice and the rhythm of his voice is mediated

⁴ Both terms "analog" and "digital" are taken from Katherine N. Hayles's theory of the "distinct but related process of making (through language and code), storing (as print and electronic text), and transmitting (through analog and digital encoding)" (*My Mother Was A Computer* 7). In this study, she correlates print with analog and electronic with digital. The same distinction is going to be followed in the current paper.

by, and inscribed in, the form of the poem. Taking into consideration David J. Bolter's and Richard Grusin's theory of remediation, one could argue that the poem is the remediation of the poet's voice.

In the case of Loyer's *Chroma*, readers/viewers are able to hear the voice of the narrator along with the text. Therefore, one could claim that putting Olson's theory alongside electronic texts—Loyer's in this case—another level of understanding is reached as to what constitutes a text and the multiple ways a text can be formulated, bringing to the fore the multimodal narrations that new media enable. Thus, in *Chroma*, the interdependence of media, the analog and the digital images and text take our mind to Bolter and Grusin's theory of remediation as well as to the interactive relationship between the media and their users. However, Tatiani G. Rapatzikou and Arthur Redding find that this relationship "is not one of dominance but of co-development and coevolution on the basis of how the differences and similarities between these two mediums challenge the perception of the users and, hence, how the perception or attitude of the users towards them shapes the make-up of the mediums both aesthetically and structurally" (3).

The readers'/viewers' interaction with the text and its medium is what eventually shapes the text, both structurally and thematically, and, therefore, the medium of the literary text affects the readers'/viewers' perception of it as well as the themes it may touch upon. Hence, the literary exchange between readers/viewers and the text is transparent and malleable.

Loyer's *Chroma* constitutes an interactive serial project that examines issues of racial identity in virtual environments through a tightly-choreographed combination of graphics, voice and music. Three digital explorers are asked by their mentor to create avatars that will enable the exploration of the newly-rediscovered cyber-spatial terrain called "mnemonos" that humans lost the ability to access long ago. Conflict arises when one character questions human representation in the digital world. Interactive real-time animations are used to represent the thoughts and feelings of the main characters, responding to the users in intimate ways that help illuminate the way the story unfolds, while building emotional connections with its central players.

The story world is guided by three protagonists: Orion 17, Duck at the Door and Grid Farmer Perry. Also, this is infused with the "mnemonos" myth, as explained further down, and the search for pure states of interconnection, since the distractions of the physical world have obstructed people from communicating and interconnecting with each other. Loyer's text is divided into seven chapters and each one of them is a journal entry that records the characters' experiences of their journey to the virtual world of "mnemonos." Although each chapter/journal entry has a specific date, these dates do not determine the way the narrative develops. On certain occasions, they indicate the simultaneity of the course of certain events, as is the case with chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6 which bear the same date. It seems to me that Loyer employs this technique in order to offer readers/viewers access to the events of that date through multiple perspectives. What is more, the random placement of the dates emphasizes the non-linearity of his text as readers/viewers are presented with three navigation modes. One possible navigation mode is to read/view the text in chronological order. Another possible navigation mode could be to read/view the text in a numerical order by following each chapter, the third one could be to read them randomly by just clicking on each chapter separately. The present navigation in Loyer's *Chroma* will be conducted in a numerical order of the chapters.

As mentioned above in this article, this cyber-world the three explorers attempt to enter is called "mnemonos." It seems to me that it is not a randomly selected name for this world. Pressman argues that "mnemonos" is "named after the Greek goddess of memory, Mnemosyne, who is also mother to the Muses and inventor of words [...]. Memory is thus intrinsic to creating a plot or narrative" (195), be it a literary narrative or a life narrative. This subtle connection of "mnemonos" to memory indicates that in Loyer's version of "mnemonos," previous states of coexistence, interconnection and intercommunication are recalled or brought together. In "mnemonos" and outside of it, Loyer's characters are trying to

remember their original, natural state of existence prior to technology. So, technology is viewed in this case as distraction causing a rupture in the in-between relationships of the characters. Readers/viewers are led to a menu page where they are given the option to choose which chapter they wish to explore first, or the option to skip one or more chapters. As a result, they are in charge of the sequencing of the narrative. In their online article "Digital Manipulability and Digital Literature," Serge Bouchardon and David Heckman argue that "in digital works, the reader has to make an action (roll over, drag and drop, type letters). This manipulation of media (text, image, video) contributes to the construction of meaning."

Since Loyer's text is interactive, readers are often asked to enter the text by clicking on a button which puts them in charge of the narration and the ordering of the narrative events. Hence, the readers acquire certain authority over the text which they can share with other readers. Therefore, in this sense, linearity is subjective and the procession of the narration depends upon the individual readers of the text. This interactivity offers readers a new textual experience which certainly affects the way certain issues, as is the case of racial identity, are tackled. This is the point the following section attempts to explore.

The Experience of Online Racial Identity in *Chroma*

As mentioned in the introduction of the present article, new media have affected the way people perceive racial identity. New media have offered new grounds for self-definition and self-identification. Through his online text, Loyer explores the effect technology has on people's lives with regard to self-definition and self-identification and the way it influences their social unity.

In *Chroma*, Loyer embarks on an exploratory journey of the online manifestation of racial identity. In order to do so, he creates an online virtual world, which is governed by certain societal rules similar to those found in the real world. To begin with, chapter 0 works as a prologue to the text entitled "Prologue: An Introduction to Marrow." In this chapter, Loyer presents this virtual world of "mnemonos," in which people are all connected to each other via a "marrow," a substance that transmits information. The narrator in this chapter is a character named Dr. Ian Anders. The chapter is dated Wednesday March 4, 1998, creating thus the impression of a journal entry. The narrator's male sounding voice informs the readers/viewers about the plot, the characters and their roles in the narrative. While Dr. Ian Anders is narrating the story, there is music playing in the background. The outcome is a very tightly synchronized combination of interactive motion graphics, music, and narration that enliven the *Chroma* reading/viewing experience. The unfolding of the text is accompanied by music that indicates the intonation, the reading pace and the rhythm of the narration process. It also indicates the moments of tension within the text, as the music at times is mellow and at times more intense. The narration proceeds as such along with the combination of various visual elements that are guided by the readers/viewers by "mouse" clicks. The narrator claims that "humans have always been digital. /The name we give to things that are perfect, /that do not decay, /that can be duplicated without end, /that are abstract /but somehow tangible" ("chapter 0" *Chroma*).

Loyer explores the extent to which people and societies are balanced and work, and parallels the level of social perfection to the digitally-created one. In order to do so, he employs digital characters. The electronic medium, being a technological and artificial construct, offers its users the opportunity to emulate worlds similar to their real ones, this being the American society itself. This allows Loyer to touch upon fundamental issues regarding the American society and the people in it without triggering any controversies. This is why Loyer places his narrative within the "mnemonos" cyber-world. However, via Dr. Ian Anders, the narrator in chapter 0, Loyer comments on the attempt of the American society to create uniformity among its members, which may be at the expense of uniqueness. This happens at the time readers/viewers are able to access the following digital human forms:

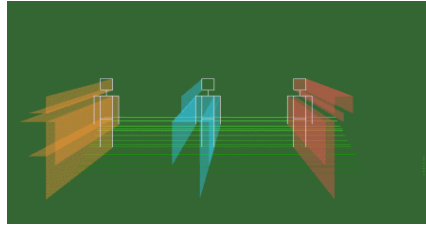


Fig. 1: The three main characters entering "mnemonos"⁵

In this scene from *Chroma*, the readers/viewers are introduced to the three characters in the text. However, it is the third dimension that renders each individual unique. This particular screenshot depicts the moment when the three digital explorers discover "mnemonos." What is interesting here is the fact that the distinct physical characteristics of each individual character are lost. For instance, one is not able to infer the gender, age or ethnicity even of the three characters depicted in the above scene. Neither is one able to distinguish the personal characteristics that make each individual unique. Since the digital body is stripped of all its distinctive traits, then it is the reader/viewer who has to ascribe those characteristics to the digitally-described bodies. Mark B.N. Hansen terms such a body as "a *body-in-code* in a completely literal sense, meaning a body image that is indiscernible from a technically generated body schema" (49). The bodies of the three characters, as depicted in the shot, are not clearly shaped, as the lines defining them are quite blurry. Thus, the readers/viewers are allowed to construct the characters according to how they imagine them, on the basis of their own racial assumptions and predispositions.

In Loyer's text, characters often confuse objective reality with virtual reality due to the fact that action takes place in a virtual realm. However, Loyer establishes, at the beginning of the text, an interconnection between reality and the cyber-spatial world, which is termed as "natural," when he writes that "[y]ears ago all humans had the ability to enter 'mnemonos,' a 'natural cyber-space' where the things of the mind appear as real as anything your five senses perceive" ("chapter 0" *Chroma*). So, in their search of the "mnemonos," humans have been after its approximation since they are not aware of its original state form. Loyer criticizes the lack of originality and the fact that humans feel much safer with the reproduction of old ideals, narratives and achievements than with seeking new forms of expression. It seems to me that the "natural" cyber-space Loyer mentions in *Chroma* is actually a simulation of the real world, a hyperreal world that is constructed as a substitute for the real one that is long gone. Jean Baudrillard, in his essay "The Map Precedes the Territory," mentions that "[s]imulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal" (80). With these words, Baudrillard refers to a virtual realm which does not necessarily represent a particular model of reality, but a virtually constructed copy of it which may not at all be corresponding to real life situations. In *Chroma*, Loyer merges the real with the virtual world in order to comment on the omnipotence of the World Wide Web as the main field of action and interaction in the western world. As Marie-Laure Ryan asserts, "[n]owadays we label virtual everything we experience or meet in 'cyber-space,' the imaginary place where computers take us when we log on to the Internet: virtual friends, virtual sex, virtual universities, virtual tours of virtual cities" (25).

Based on the argument Ryan makes, one would claim that Loyer criticizes the way contemporary people lead a "virtual" rather than a real life, as they avoid any engagement with their socio-cultural environment, since most of their everyday tasks are performed online, which may lead to a falsified impression about them.

⁵ The screenshot taken from Loyer's personal blog reads, "Chroma's main characters have discovered an Edenic 'natural cyberspace' accessible purely through the mind" (*Chroma*).

In *Chroma*, chapters five and six, Loyer touches upon the digital existence and presence of humans through the use of invented digital bodies that he calls avatars. To begin with, both chapters are titled “Prologue: Journal Entry” and are dated as, Thursday 8 July 1999. In chapter five, readers/viewers follow Orion 17’s narration, while in chapter six they follow Duck at the Door’s, since he is the only one who objects to the creation of distinct avatars in “mnemonos.” Orion 17 asserts that,

When you enter the mnemonos you have no body
You’re just a will, shaping information and data however you wish.
But because there are no eyes in marrow, no ears
or skin, the only way for you to experience something
there is to know it (“chapter 5” *Chroma*).

People understand the world through their senses, so their body functions as the primary processor of incoming information. This information is later decoded so that individuals are able to understand what they see around them. However, the inhabitants of “mnemonos” do not possess a body; they exist in a kind of spiritual form and they experience the world through information coming through the marrow. Therefore, the body is for them a medium for the transmission of information and a locus for the negotiation of meanings.

As Carol E. Henderson maintains, the body possesses the ability “to tell stories: vividly, subtly, powerfully” (2). In other words, the body is also equipped with an inscriptive ability which serves in the spreading of information regarding a personal identity narrative. In the absence of a body within “mnemonos,” the three characters are not able to detect any differences among them or any unique characteristics for that matter. Orion 17 is of the belief that DNA is “a kind of program that describes a human body” (“chapter 5” *Chroma*). So, in the case of a DNA-programmed identity, one may realize that this is in fact an inscribed and predetermined identity derived from certain norms that are generated by the fixity of the DNA evidence. Thus Orion 17 believes that for the amelioration of intercommunication, the three characters should “design avatars, virtual bodies for us/to wear while we’re in marrow” (“chapter 5” *Chroma*).

Maya Garau, in her study “Selective Fidelity: Investigating Priorities for the Creation of Expressive Avatars,” supports that “[a]vatars play a significant role in all of these contexts [...] opening multiple possibilities for interaction” (18). If we see this point in conjunction with Loyer’s case, one can claim that avatars allow the three digital characters to communicate easier while they are in “mnemonos.” An avatar is an invented body, in other words, it is an invented identity in an online environment shaped and modified by its users. In creating their avatar, users are either allowed complete freedom, or they have to select the traits of their avatars from a predetermined list of characteristics. Each trait, in turn, ascribes to the avatars certain possibilities and power according to Duck at the Door’s observations, as will be explained later in this article. However, in *Chroma*—similarly as in every digital environment—the characters are those who create and shape these traits. This implies that in “mnemonos” all three characters are offered equal opportunities as to their self-identification. Orion 17 argues that a visible and tangible interlocutor makes the process of communication plausible and effective. However, in light of the fact that the digital world is also a virtual one, the sense of tangibility the characters in Loyer’s narrative are after cannot be deemed as real. Nakamura takes this argument in *Digitizing Race* a step further by saying that “identity is detached from biological bodies and reassigned to the realm of the cultural, political, and geographic” (83). This means that identity is no longer defined by physical appearance, but it is an aggregation of other elements, such as the place one is born and resides in, the culture of the group one belongs to, and the politics underlying one’s identity. In *Chroma*, the characters’ digital identity is shaped by the cyber-spatial place they



Fig.2: *Life as a videogame one can enter with just one click*

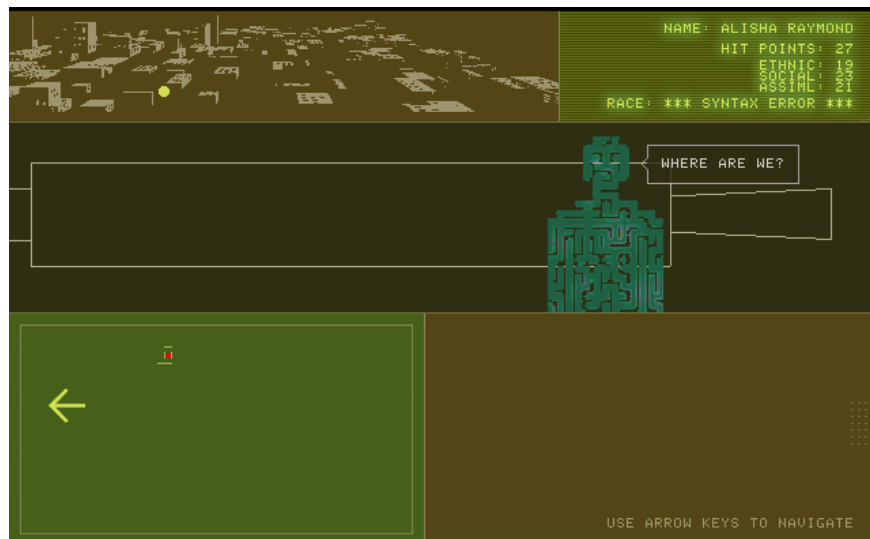


Fig. 3: *Duck at the Door's avatar.*

Live in, the culture of this virtual civilization, and the political power entailed in a digitally invented identity as theirs. Nevertheless, “mnemonos” is a virtual world which is created as an imitation of the real one and, therefore, the power that people may feel they obtain in a virtual world is artificial.

In *Chroma*, chapter six, Loyer continues the exploration of the digital self. He also presents life and the world in the form of a videogame (Fig.2) and people as avatars in a game controlled by their “physical” selves (Fig.3). One may observe here that the chapter opens precisely in the form of a videogame, as the readers/viewers are asked to interact with the text in order to initiate the narration process. Likewise, in the electronic text there are many who are responsible for steering the narration, rendering thus the reading experience of the electronic text a collective one. Thus, there is no unique author in this case, as a text may be also shaped by the reading process each reader/viewer will select, inserting in the text his or her own ideas and perspectives. Loyer’s videogame seems to be simulating life in terms of the rules it relies on. This brings to mind David Buckingham’s view when he claims that “[g]ames entail rules. It is rules

that give meaning to players' action (for example, by defining consequences that follow from them)" (6). Similarly, real life situations are governed by certain rules and preset ideas that shape them, in addition to people's lives that abide by them. In a videogame, there is a scenario which the characters have to follow and "the rules of the game provide a framework for the play" (Buckingham 6). In real-life situations, however, these rules are set on the basis of an array of social, cultural, and political parameters. Francisco J. Ricardo maintains that the aim of virtual reality is to create "a non-disruptive planarity of maximal resemblance to the objectival cohesion of the physical world" (13). In other words, virtual reality aims at creating a simulation of the physical world. In creating such a simulation, Loyer intends to tackle certain issues crucial to the real American society, such as identity and race, and, at the same time, he distances his arguments from reality so as to stir as little controversy as possible. By achieving such a distance, Loyer is able to offer an unbiased perspective as to how African-Americans, and people of other hyphenated ethnicities, shape their identity within the modern white American society. Having been ascribed specific identities, which also generate specific roles, people must fulfill the roles their identity ascribes to them. "There is," as Michael North states, "a formal identity between an individual citizen and the story told about him or her" (195). Sometimes this identity generates a different life narrative based on stereotypical assumptions generated by the characters in question and not by verified data. This is the kind of identity Loyer explores in *Chroma* by creating characters who are able to form their own identity through the use of avatars, although this may sound paradoxical to some. Despite the fact that societal influence is not eradicated in the online environment, it is significantly diminished, which also demonstrates its controlled and isolating character.

In this last chapter, the narrator Duck at the Door stands for all those people of hyphenated ethnicities. She narrates her life experience as a person of hyphenated ethnic identity. In Loyer's videogame narrative, animated graphics are used so as to place emphasis on or represent Duck at the Door's character and identity construction. Maria Fernandez, in "Postcolonial Media Theory," asserts that "discussions of identity in electronic media theory concentrate on the individual as author of his or her own identity" (64). It seems to me that this is the point Loyer attempts to raise in his narrative, that it is not society or any other hegemonic institution, but people themselves who are or should be in control of their selves and identity. However, the paradox in this point is that Loyer's game is created by the designer and not by the players themselves, rendering a sense of individual power in the virtual world once again artificial. Thus, the players are merely in partial control of the game narrative, as well as the narrative of their character in the game. What Loyer pinpoints here is that at least people in a game environment become aware of the forces shaping their identities while participating in this process themselves. Duck at the Door mentions that she lives in an invented body, an avatar, which is a body that her parents constructed for her. More specifically she says:

I've had experience with invented bodies before.
I live in one.
It was invented for me by my parents,
as part of a game they were playing.
A role-playing game like Dungeons and Dragons,
where every character is conjured
from a few elemental abilities
Strength, Dexterity, Charisma
My parents were playing an American
Variation of this kind of game
That was all about race.
Instead of Strength and Dexterity,
We had Social Status and Ethnic Flavor.
Instead of Charisma, we had Crossover Potential.

Every character could also belong to one and only one racial group, a rule my parents chose to subvert ("chapter 6" *Chroma*).

Duck at the Door explains that her parents were the ones playing this "game" and they were also the ones who introduced her to it. Loyer highlights the importance of our ancestor's choices and stance against circumstances that shape the lives of the next generations, leaving them without any choice. This is sometimes the case with role-playing games, that is, the programmer or the Game Master who has made choices that shape the "lives" of the characters or players in the game. In this case, the players are forced to follow the path that has been forged for them by the programmer or the Game Master without having the option to make their own choices or amendments.

There are certain similarities between literary narrative and setting and that of a role-playing game. The most important is that both in literature and role-playing games there is a narration that reveals the plot to the readers and players. In role-playing games, the narrator is the program itself in the form of a leading character in the game. In fact, the narrator in role-playing games is the computer itself. According to Monte Cook, the Master of *Dungeons and Dragons*⁶—the first of this kind of role-playing games—says that "similar[ly] to a novelist or screenwriter, the game master invents a host of characters that fill out the minor roles of the story or simply act as 'extras' without lines at all" (99). The results of the player's choices and the overall storyline for the game are determined by the Dungeon Master (DM) according to the rules of the game and the DM's interpretation of those rules. Therefore, a DM serves as the game's point of reference and storyteller, also maintaining the setting in which the adventures occur and the impact they have on the development of the game. Loyer employs this online game so as to shed light on the socio-cultural as well as authoritative forces that shape identity. For instance, Duck at the Door is forced to play the role determined by her parents that has nothing to do with her own desires, feelings and life choices. So in Loyer's case, Duck at the Door is critical of the fixity of the process of identity formation taking place in the game environment and, to an extent, in society itself. In this game, there is someone in control of the lives of the characters and of the "writing" of the preset scenario of their lives as well.

In reality itself, people are not always free to form their own identity, since their choices are predetermined by societal factors. As Nakamura maintains in her article "Race in the Construct, or the Construction of Race: New Media and Old Identities in 'The Matrix,'" there are people "who don't fit into one racial 'box'" (67). So, in the case that the predetermined options offered to the *Chroma* users do not relate to the specific racial identity the users feel they belong to, new racial categories are created. In a role-playing game, like Nakamura maintains, there is "a menu-driven sense of personal identity that works by progressively narrowing the choices of subject positions available to the user" (104). If this is the case, then, in *Chroma*, the users are not allowed to form their identity freely, as they are forced to select the characteristics that are available in the character formation menu. Hence, identity formation in such a medium is partially fixed by the programmer. This reminds us of official government documents and application forms, where users or applicants are invited to tick certain race and gender boxes with the options of "male" or "female," "black" or "Caucasian," and so on. Loyer criticizes the fixed identity labels that exist within American society that limit the racial identification of a person.

As mentioned earlier in this article, what makes online role-playing games interesting is the literary elements they resort to. Jesper Juul, in his online article "Games Telling Stories?: A Brief Note On games and Narratives," finds that "[m]any computer games contain narrative elements, and in many cases the player may play to see a cut-scene or realize a narrative sequence." Thus, computer games and literary

⁶ The game *Dungeons and Dragons* was launched in 1974. Between 1974 and 2008 there have been four new and revised editions of the game. These were launched in order to enrich and modernize the game which was enhanced by the technological advancements made from one edition to the next. It is worth noting that the game is still active today.

works share the most important characteristic, that of telling a story. One could also argue that life itself is a narrative which, as with the case of computer games, one has to “play” it to its fullest in order to expose its narrative sequences and content. In the game described by Loyer’s *Duck at the Door*, the characteristics of the players’ avatars have been replaced by those of a real person. Each identity choice ascribes to the character certain possibilities as *Duck at the Door* explains: “belonging to a particular race/gives your character special abilities” (“chapter 6” *Chroma*). Loyer exemplifies this claim by offering the readers/viewers a graphical image of the abilities one acquires when choosing one of the three specific racial identities the game offers, which are Black, White and Latino (see Fig.4). *Duck at the Door* mentions that “if you check African-American, then all your character’s attempts to make music, /dance or play sports are automatically enhanced” (“chapter 6” *Chroma*) (see Fig.5). In this game, the characteristics ascribed to each identity choice are built upon the stereotypical beliefs about each racial identity. Loyer comments on the fact that sometimes people in their struggle to get rid of certain stereotypes, regarding their racial identity and ancestry, end up creating new ones. *Duck at the Door* continues: “Checking Caucasian will make you more likely to succeed/in matters of business. /Checking Asian improves your skills with technology. /It all works out very neatly” (“chapter 6” *Chroma*) (Fig. 6 and 7). The articulation of such beliefs in the context of Loyer’s game highlights,

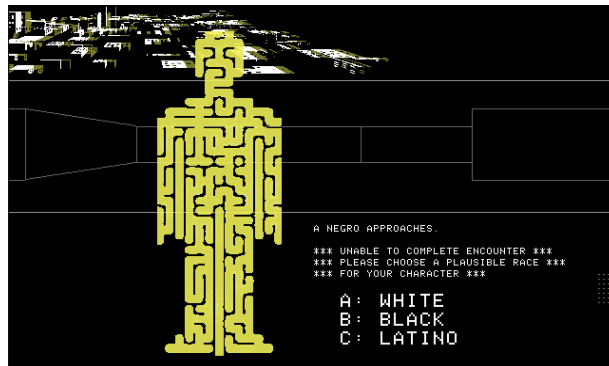


Fig. 4: Identity choices for the user's avatar.



Fig. 5: *What happens when one chooses A.*

echoing Nakamura's words in *Cybertypes*, the fact that internet "is a place where race happens" (xi). In particular, in Loyer's *Chroma* there are those who make the rules, the "Castle Masters," and those who can change the rules. Loyer maintains that people should take action in order to bring about change, and

stop placing all their hopes upon the willingness of the hegemonic forces to realize their mistakes and “change the rules.” It is not the Castle Master who is changing the rules but the characters, Perry and Orion themselves, who are “coming up with a new game. They’re coming up with the rules, right now” (“chapter 6” *Chroma*). Therefore, those who can bring about change in the American society are the people who are ready to question the rules themselves. That is, they should come up with the strategies needed in order to change and ameliorate those things that they do not like about their life and social status.



Fig. 7: What happens when one chooses C.

Concluding Remarks

The technological medium of literary and artistic production offers new avenues for exploration and enhances the experience of the readers'/viewers' interaction with Loyer's online environment. The emergence of digital literature and art brings to the fore new perceptions of human nature and identity, as these are influenced by the technological medium. In his graphic text, *Chroma*, Loyer demonstrates that digital presence may also influence the way racial and ethnic identity and culture are shaped and constructed via the technological medium. However, it seems to me that in this technological mediation of identity something is lost with regard to human adversity and spontaneity. On the other hand, technological artistic production offers individuals the power to ascribe to the virtual body, the avatar, the physical characteristics and personality traits they wish. Still, in the case of character formation through avatars, readers are allowed partial freedom as they are invited to choose the characteristics from a preset list. Even so, the preset lists may entail racial, personality or gender characteristics which are based on stereotypical beliefs which entail certain risks. While it offers its users greater flexibility as to the possibilities made available, it can also trap a person due to its false depictions of identity.

The technological medium is a multi-vocal one, as it allows many voices to be “heard” and thus many racial identities to merge, be displayed and emerge. It also allows for the exploration of various states of being, as these may lead to certain misrepresentations or distortions of the information transmitted. As regards racism, this is created due to the misconceptions formulated within society. As for the increasing dependence of people upon technology, it has placed them in a dormant state hindering their connection to other people’s realities. Therefore, meaningful communication among people is lost due to the increasing interference of technology with people’s everyday activities. Despite the benefits of the technologically-mediated perception, racism still exists and sometimes it is also enhanced. People are constantly asked to state their identity every time they come in contact with technology, be it a cell-phone, video or online game or a chat-room. For example, when people make a phone call they are often asked to identify themselves by their interlocutor as one is not able to know the caller’s identity unless one has activated their caller identification service. In the case of a video as well as online game or a chat-room, the user is asked to identify which character will be utilized every time one wishes to interact with others

within this environment. During the identity formation process, users are asked to either fill in certain forms choosing from a list of preset identities, or to form their own identity from a list of preset options. However, these lists are formulated according to racial stereotypes ensnaring people into a preset identity which they have no authority to modify, thus contributing to the perpetuation of stereotypical racial beliefs.

Having closely read and analyzed Loyer's text along with the theorists employed in the present article, one can infer that there are certain important arguments that Loyer wishes to make, putting to use the advantages that new media offer both in writing and in revisiting certain important issues. What Loyer demonstrates in his work is that despite the fact that people nowadays acquire more knowledge about the world at large, there has been no real change in the attitudes they hold for each other. Therefore, Loyer argues that it is not technological advancements that will bring about change in people's attitudes with regard to racist beliefs, but people themselves who need to take action in order to eradicate racism and all other misconceptions—as Loyer terms it—located within the American society and the world. As far as technology is concerned, Loyer proposes to utilize it wisely with a critical mind, otherwise it will too become a means of perpetuating racism. He urges people to use technology up to the point that it facilitates their everyday life and communication. However, Loyer cautions people to be aware of the ways technology may hinder communication or manipulate information. All in all, Loyer condones the use of technology in all fields provided that people are fully aware of the dangers that it entails.

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Navajo Portrayals in the Mass Media

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyze Navajo portrayals in the mass media, taking as representative instances an episode from *Jamie's American Road Trip* (2009) and a Mars commercial, "The Indian" (1998). I will analyze how the commercial and the episode from the TV series present the Navajo identity and if there can still be found elements from the Noble Savage imagery. The starting point of this analysis is the theoretical framework offered by Philip Deloria's *Playing Indian* and Robert Berkhofer's *White Man's Indian*. While these works talk about how Native Americans have been perceived in general, I will argue that the point made by these two authors can be applied in the case of the Navajos, more specifically in order to analyze how the American mass media has been representing them. The Mars commercial manages to present the Navajos as a distinctive group, but at the same time, it uses stereotypes as the Noble Savage and the dying, nature – loving Indian, in order to sell and to be understood by many. *Jamie's American Road Trip*, like the Mars commercial, is proof that trying to approach Native American cultures by comparing them with Western culture will result in misleading conclusions.

Keywords: Navajo, mass media representations, Noble Savage theory, Jamie's American Road Trip, images of the Other

Introduction

The starting point of this analysis is the theoretical framework offered by Philip Deloria's *Playing Indian* and Robert Berkhofer's *White Man's Indian*. First, I will look at how Native Americans in general have been seen by White America, as it results from the two authors mentioned above. Secondly, I will demonstrate how Deloria and Berkhofer's conclusions apply in the case of the Navajos, focusing on the mass media representations of Navajos.

Navajos have been seen by the Americans as the Other, and this image was the result of Western society's imaginings and stereotypes: "Indian Other has been constructed at the intersection of real and imagined Indians. Colonists (mis)perceived real Indian people through a variety of European cultural lenses. Religion, gender relations, subsistence, technology, these and many other perspectives defined and distorted the way Europeans saw Indians" (Berkhofer 20).

Therefore, the representations of Native Americans in the American culture have more to do with the way White Americans perceive the world than with how Native people see themselves.

Moreover, Western society tried to relate to the Native cultures and people through a series of attitudes, as for example: "(1) generalizing from one tribe's society and culture to all Indians, (2) conceiving of Indians in terms of their deficiencies according to White ideals rather than in terms of their own cultures, and (3) using moral evaluation as description of Indians" (Berkhofer 27).

These attitudes further fossilized in the American conscience the stereotyped view on Native people, as "preconception seemed to have created image, and image in turn became fact" (Berkhofer 17), thus making it more difficult to separate reality from imagination.

By denying Native Americans cultural individuality and by trying to understand Native cultures through Western practices, a dual image of the Native took shape: one that emphasized the savage aspect in order to justify the conquest of America, and one that emphasized the noble aspect, meant as a critique to Western society. However, these two aspects were never fully separated, rather they combined into one single image, that of the Noble Savage. This image of the Noble Savage has nothing to do with how Native

Americans perceive themselves; rather it shows how Whites have perceived Native Americans. This dual way of looking at Native people has generated a dual attitude towards them: one that glorified them, and one that sought to exterminate them.

The relations between White Americans and Native Americans and the way in which Native people have been portrayed have been influenced by the fact that White Americans saw themselves as the classifiers, which meant they had the power to imagine a role for the classified. This is what Berkhofer argued by saying that “the paradigm of polarity that lies at the heart of minority and race relations assumes uniqueness for the Whites as classifiers and for native Americans as the classified only through the content of specific imagery and the context of a particular history and space” (XVI).

Therefore, Whites have had the power to create an image of Native Americans that is not a realistic one, but rather one that relates with White Americans’ way of seeing.

The particular history and space that Berkhofer mentions is strongly connected with the image of the Noble Savage that was greatly reinforced after White America stopped perceiving Native people as a menace. After the Native Americans’ defeat and their being sent to reservations, this romantic, idealistic and at the same time stereotypical view on Native Americans was widely spread. Thinking of Native Americans as Noble Savages has resulted in perceiving them as being outside history: as progress could be found only in connection with civilization as Western society understands it, and as the Natives have been seen as opposed to Western society, it results that there could not be any progress or change in Native American cultures. In this way, the Natives were seen as static, ahistorical, with no possibility of progress or change. If changes did happen, White Americans interpreted it in a dual, contradictory manner.

On the one hand, White America has always considered that Western society was meant to take over Native American cultures, and it was only a matter of time until this happened, as Berkhofer points out: “since the superiority of the American Way of Life appeared self-evident to them, they thought that Indians too would see it in their immediate self-interest to adopt the habits and beliefs of the (good) White American after a brief demonstration” (150).

On the other hand, if Native people did change their traditions, White Americans interpreted this as adopting Western vices rather than Western culture. As Deloria points out, those Native Americans that have changed their traditions to some degree, are being perceived as less Native American.

Bearing these views on Native Americans in mind, I will show how they apply in the case of the Navajos, by focusing on the Navajo portrayals in the mass media, taking as representative instances an episode from *Jamie’s American Road Trip*—more specifically the one dealing with Arizona—, released in August 2009 in the United Kingdom, and a Mars commercial, entitled “The Indian,” made by D’arcy Sa, released in December 1998.

The Mars Commercial – 1998

The Mars Commercial, made by D’arcy Sa, was released in December 1998 and it features two Native American men, an elderly person and a young one, speaking in Navajo. They wear the full Navajo regalia and are shown climbing a hill in an arid zone that resembles the Navajo reservation; they reach their target and the old man says to the boy: “My son, it is a good day today!” followed by praying. All this is interrupted as the old man finds in the pocket of the young man a Mars bar, tastes it and the pure joy that he finds in this makes him spread a tear and say: “Son, it would be great if you could set me up on a date with Little Flower!”

The use of Native Americans in order to sell diverse goods has been going on for a longtime as Berkhofer argues:

Real and imitation Indian jewelry festooned the arms and necks of White American men and women, while bedspreads, towels, and tablecloths decorated with supposed Indian motifs adorned their homes. Books by and about Indians made the best-seller lists, and Indian heroes appeared upon movies and television

screens. Authentic and fake Indians emerged in mass-media advertisements to sell everything from breakfast cereals to ecology. (XIII)

The emergence of Native Americans in the world of selling is no coincidence: to the White mind, the Native is a person deeply connected with nature, appreciating simpler and purer things in life, in other words, the Native is the reverse of the White urban American. Deloria argues that "The Red Men represented this unknowable knowledge with an enigmatic past that lay traced on the national landscape in the form of thousands of mysterious burial mounds. Even as Indianness was imagined as being temporally and intellectually outside national boundaries, it remained essentially American in nature" (Deloria 60).

This, however, has not led to a realistic view of Native American identity.

Perceiving that the Natives have a deep connection with nature has not in reality led to a just understanding of Native cultures, rather it has led to the image of the Noble Savage:

Along with handsomeness of physique and physiognomy went great stamina and endurance. Modest in attitude if not always in dress, the noble Indian exhibited great calm and dignity in bearing, conversation, and even under torture. Brave in combat, he was tender in love for family and children. Pride in himself and independence of other persons combined with a plain existence and wholesome enjoyment of nature's gift. According to this version, the Indian, in short, lived a life of liberty, simplicity, and innocence (Berkhofer 28).

This image of the Noble Savage is a persistent one and Berkhofer gives the example of John Collier, who "saw the Indians as repudiating the materialism, the secularism, and the fragmentation of modern White life under industrialism for a simpler, more beautiful way of life that emphasized the relationship of humans with one another, with the supernatural, and with land and nature" (Berkhofer 178).

Elements of this image of the Noble Savage can be found in the Mars commercial, even though there are some elements that reinforce Navajo identity: the commercial features two Navajo men, dressed in the traditional Navajo manner, walking through the Navajo reservation and most importantly, speaking Navajo language. Wilkins argues that "for untold generations the basis of unity among Navajo Indians has been a well-defined territory, a common language, a shared heritage of customs and beliefs, and a sense of ideological distinction separating them from all other tribes, nations and groups" (Wilkins 6).

In this sense, the commercial shows important aspects of Navajo identity.

Despite these elements, the commercial does remit to the image of the noble Indian that possessed great endurance and dignity, as the old man is climbing a hill in the desert to pick the place for his final rest, all this without complaining. The Indian's love for simplicity and purity had to be present as the purpose of the commercial is to sell a chocolate bar that is supposed to be that good and pure that even the nature-loving Indian would prefer to live in order to taste it.

Why the commercial uses this rhetoric is explained by Berkhofer:

the Indian lost his place as an important subject in what we might call elite or formal art and literature. The Indian, however, did play a significant, if subordinate, role in the popular arts (...). If the elite artist appeals to the few, the popular artist entertains the many. The elite artist presumes a rather exclusive audience with high critical standards searching for new ways of interpreting experience, while the popular artist seeks as large an audience as possible, using the predictable, familiar ways of looking at things. (96)

As the target public of the commercial is not elite, but rather a wide and diverse group of people, it uses common images and perceptions about Natives, even though the above-mentioned elements do refer explicitly to Navajo identity. This creates a problem, since the general perception of the Native population

by the White American society is that “all Indians possessed the same basic qualities” (Berkhofer 26), therefore, elements of Navajo identity are known to Navajos and an elite of people only.

The solution to this dilemma can be found in Deloria’s affirmation that

as hobbyists imagined an accessible Indian culture, they also refigured racial difference around at least three variables: genetic quantum, geographical residence, and culture attitude. The highest possible degree of authenticity inhered in the traditional, reservation-based full blood. The least authentic figure was the progressive, urban, low-quantum mixed-blood. (143)

Therefore, full-blood Navajo would be perceived as being more in touch with nature and will provide a higher degree of authenticity than mere imitations of the Native people.

Also, given that White Americans used to perceive the Natives as dead or at least regarded most of their traditional culture as having disappeared, they started to be interested in what they perceived as the past: “with the Indian past fading away, the documenting of it became a vital activity” (Deloria 80). This contradiction of destroying Native cultures and then starting to show an intensive interest in them can be explained by Deloria’s argument that “Americans wanted to feel a natural affinity with the continent, and it was Indians who could teach them such aboriginal closeness. Yet, in order to control the landscape, they had to destroy the original inhabitants” (5), remitting to the ambivalent way of how Whites have related to Native Americans.

Moreover, it should be noted that the commercial presents a dying man, and the association of Native people and death has always been one that aroused sentimentalism, as Berkhofer argues: “the nostalgia and pity aroused by the dying race produced the best romantic sensibilities” (88). Sollors explains that Native Americans “were associated with autumn leaves and death, with rocks that are their nature and sepulcher at the same time. In the cult of the vanishing Indian, the children of nature were forever imagined on the brink of the abyss” (117).

The playing with dying and living in the commercial can be linked to a general tendency in White society that Deloria depicted as “a dual feeling about the Indian. The desire to extirpate [him]. And the contradictory desire to glorify him” (4), this being an old-time attitude towards the Natives.

In conclusion, the Mars commercial manages to present the Navajo as a distinctive group by including specific Navajo elements—language, reservation, dress wear—, but at the same time, it uses stereotypes as the Noble Savage and the dying, nature-loving Indian, in order to sell and to be understood by many. This paradox is the result of the method of how White America is trying to understand the Native cultures in general, and the Navajo culture in particular: by comparing it with their own culture and basing the process of understanding on stereotypes and false expectations.

Jamie’s American Road Trip—Arizona

Jamie’s American Road Trip released in 2009 in the United Kingdom features one episode in which Jamie travels to the Navajo Reservation in Arizona in order to learn about traditional Navajo food. For a better understanding of how Navajos are portrayed in this show, we have to bear in mind that what we see is through the presenter’s gaze and, in this case, it should be taken into consideration what the presenter knows and what his expectations are. From the beginning, it is made clear that the purpose of the show is to discover a piece of American cuisine, in this case “one that is on the brink of extinction,” and the show host is honest in telling the viewers that most of his expectations come from movies with cowboys and Indians and he does have an idea that Western people “haven’t been nice to them.” These facts are vital for a correct analysis of how Navajo society is depicted in the show, because the person who will realize most of this analysis has no real knowledge about the Navajos, except that the Navajo reservation is “the largest area managed by Natives in the United States,” a fact emphasized by Knowles—

“it is the biggest Native American reservation in the country” (Knowles 4)—and that “today, the Navajos are the largest native tribe in the US” (Rosinsky 5).

From the beginning, reality does not match the expectations: to the show host’s surprise, Roy, the Navajo who is hosting him, offers Jamie a pair of moccasins “to reconnect with earth,” even the Navajo corn seems different to the Western taste—“it’s blue and has a sweet taste.” This, combined with the arid surroundings, creates the idea that the Navajo reservation is a bubble, that “this is not America, it’s a different place,” which, in the eyes of Jamie, resembles “the third world” and the African shabby towns, and reminds one at the same time that the Navajos “used to be great farmers.” After spending more time in the reservation, things start to not look so bad, but the Navajo lifestyle is still compared with the Western one, as Jamie feels that “it would be nice if this place had a toilet.” This relates to the image that most Westerners had and still have of the Natives “as lacking in European accomplishments but pleasant withal” (Berkhofer 6).

As the purpose of the show is to learn about Navajo cuisine, Jamie meets a local chef, whom he describes as “the closest thing to a Navajo Nigella,” again comparing the Navajo lifestyle with the Western one. Navajo food tastes different from the food Western society is used to, being thus perceived as “weird.” Even if the presenter realizes that if Navajos eat it, then it must be good, he cannot cover his suspicion, saying that “I can’t believe it’s going to taste good.” This method of understanding the Navajo lifestyle by comparing it to the Western world and trying to find similarities can prove misleading: for example, trying to understand the Navajo spirituality by comparing it with the Western religions. Jamie assists Roy in the daily morning blessing, that he describes as Roy starting “each day with prayers to the Navajo gods” and when Roy invites him to do the blessing as well, Jamie says “I just want to say hello to all the deities.”

This does not correspond to the Navajo way of seeing life: the Navajo language lacks a word for “religion” and the Western notion of gods, as influenced by polytheistic religions, has nothing in common with the manner in which Navajos relate to the universe. The blessing Roy performs each morning is part of *hózhó*, a central principal in the Navajo spirituality that refers to “a state (in the sense of condition) where everything, tangible and intangible, is in its proper place and functioning well with everything else, such that the condition produced can be described as peace, harmony, and balance (for lack of better English terms)” (Austin 54).

The blessing helps create the *hózhó* through creating what Austin presents as

harmonious relationship at three different levels that Navajos observe in daily life and in ceremony: (1) the human level (e.g., relationships among family members, clan members, and tribe members through *k’é* and the kinship system); (2) the universal level (e.g., relationships among elements in the universe through universal laws—or natural laws—such as the sun and earth in unison produce life on earth); and (3) spiritual level (e.g., relationships between Navajos and Holy Beings through ceremony, prayer, ritual, and offering). (84)

The pastoral aspect of the Navajo lifestyle is revealed when Roy teaches Jamie that a true Navajo knows how to butcher a sheep, in the Navajo traditional style and also following the Navajo traditional style, the sheep will be consumed entirely, nothing being wasted. Austin explains why Navajos do not just use selective parts from the animal they hunt or butcher like the Whites do:

traditional Navajos pray before hunting and thank the Holy Beings and the “four-legged beings” for a successful hunt—the latter for sacrificing themselves as food for “earth surface beings.” The universal relations doctrine is about community and order; all the multifarious elements in the universe constitute a community of relatives that exists in time and space in a harmonious balance. (84)

Unlike Westerners, Navajos do not consider that humans have the right to transform the environment as they please.

Therefore, unlike the Whites who believe people are superior beings, hence, have the right to subdue the rest of the beings and the environment, Navajos believe in what Austin describes as "the universal relations doctrine (*T'áá altso alk'él daniidle*), a foundational principle in Navajo cosmology, holds that all beings in the universe are interrelated, interconnected, and interdependent; thus, all beings are relatives in a theoretical sense" (83).

The butchering lesson brings out Ir problem: from the start, Jamie notices that Navajo women wear Nike and not moccasins—and this contradicts his and most Westerners expectations that Native people from today are the same as those of a century ago. Moreover, it shows that this type of traditional Navajo food is not appreciated by the young, who prefer junk food. This leads Jamie to a visit in the nearby towns where there are lots of restaurants that serve ethnic food, especially Latino, but no Navajo restaurant, which makes him reach the conclusion that the Navajos keep their traditions too close to them.

Berkhofer offers an explanation of why Westerners' expectations about Native ways of living are not going to meet reality:

Indian traditions have neither fossilized nor disappeared; Indian ways of today are not those of centuries ago but they are nonetheless Indian. Indian cultural traditions have continued to grow and change, and there has been constant integration of innovations into characteristically Indian ways and Indian views. (68)

While White Americans continue to view Native Americans as static, Native societies do change, therefore, Whites' expectations of Native cultures will never meet reality.

This contradiction between what Whites perceive as real Indian and what is actually real comes from the fact that, as Deloria argues, "the only culture allowed to define real Indian people was a traditional culture that came from the past rather than the present" (91) because "after Indian removals, Americans often denied the physical and social presence of real Indians, reimagining vanishing Indian savages as now noble parts of a unified American past" (90).

When Native people fail to meet the White man's expectations and traditions change, the Whites generally tend to interpret this as "the desirability and, indeed, inevitability of progressive American individuals and institutions replacing the Indian tribes and their ways upon native lands" (Berkhofer 149), taking this as proof that the Western way of living is better since it seems to have overcome the Native one.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the aim of my analysis was to show that even today, one can still find elements from the theory of the Noble Savage in the relation of White America with the Navajos. *Jamie's American Road Trip*, like the Mars commercial, is proof that trying to approach the Native cultures by comparing them with the Western culture and bearing in mind what Hollywood movies say about the Native people will result in misleading conclusions. Furthermore, expecting Navajos in particular, and Native people in general, to act today as their ancestors did two centuries ago is not realistic, because the Navajo society has evolved and undergone changes, adapting to a new social and historical context, to the same extent that the Western society has also adapted. In the case of Native American cultures, cultural interchange has brought along an attitude of suspicion from the mainstream society because, according to the theory of the Noble Savage, Native American cultures are static and ahistorical. By changing their traditions, they stop being who they are and will lose their identity. Navajos, as well as other Native American groups, contradict this view: "the Diné are still here, doing what they've always done and changing as necessary" (Houk 7). This emphasizes that changing does not mean loss of identity. The episode from *Jamie's American Road Trip*

demonstrates the accuracy of Berkhofer's assessment that "preconception seemed to have created image, and image in turn became fact" (17). Moreover, it shows that approaching the Navajo culture through comparison with the Western one is misleading, as two different cultures do not necessarily operate with the same concepts and can have different attitudes towards life.

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Lorenzo Thomas' *Chances Are Few* and the African-American Identity: Examining the Impact of Mainstream American Culture on African-American Identity

Abstract: This article examines the portrayal of African-American people in the contemporary American literature and culture. Through a close reading of a selection of Lorenzo Thomas' poems from his collection *Chances Are Few* (1972), it becomes evident that black people are still confused regarding their identity, due to the influence of white people on the construction of their image. The role of the poet is to subvert this situation and offer new grounds upon which racial identity can be determined. Lorenzo Thomas revisits the clichéd images of black people in order to comment on them and expose their artificial nature as well as demonstrate the negative impact they have had on the way black people have viewed themselves. He maintains that mass media have perpetuated this artificial image of black people and exposes them as a means of propaganda led by the hegemonic white culture. This negative depiction has resulted in an inner conflict for black people who are torn between their American identity and their African heritage.

Keywords: identity, African-American Studies, poetry, mass media and black identity, Lorenzo Thomas

Introduction: Social/Historical/Cultural Background

The present article will argue that Lorenzo Thomas in his poems "Hiccups," "The Marvelous Land of Indefinitions" and "Class Action," that are found in his poetry collection *Chances Are Few* (1972), explores the image of African-American people as promoted in the American literature and media culture of the 1970s. It will also attempt to trace the impact this constructed image had on the identity and self-identification of African-American people as parts or non-parts of the white American society.

Like the 1960s—a decade of great turmoil—, the 1970s was also a decade of uprising, violence and war. In the early 1970s, the Vietnam War (1955-1975) was still raging and the American society began to react. The more the number of the dead American soldiers increased, the more the number of anti-war protests that took place. There were also many African-American soldiers at the front fighting for the US. In some of the protests there were violent episodes.

The Kent State shootings—also known as the May 4 massacre or the Kent State massacre—occurred at Kent State University in the U.S. city of Kent, Ohio, and involved the shooting of unarmed college students by members of the Ohio National Guard on Monday, May 4, 1970. The students who were shot were protesting against the American invasion in Cambodia. Ten days after this violent event, there was another shooting at another student protest against the Vietnam War. The Jackson State killings occurred on Thursday/Friday May 14–15, 1970, at Jackson State College in Jackson, Mississippi. A group of African-American student protesters were confronted by city and state police. The police opened fire, killing two students and injuring twelve. America's faith in the ideologies that govern its nation was about to be shaken once more by the Watergate scandal which was revealed in 1972, and after a series of trials ended with Nixon's resignation in 1974.

These years of political, social and moral turmoil had as a result the questioning of the ideals, morals and values upon which the American Nation was built. People also began to question the media by which

information was transmitted to them, and whether this information came to them after being censored by those who governed them.

African-American People about Themselves

African-American people have always been caught up between the black and white conflict due to the way they perceived themselves and the way they were perceived by others, and in particular by the white Americans. That is, the image and the identity of the black people have been shaped according to W.E.B. Du Bois' theory of "double consciousness," as analyzed in his essay "The Soul of Black Folks" (1903). Du Bois argues that "[i]t is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (9).

Black people have always defined themselves through the way that white people saw them to be and the way they perceived their distinct cultural and ethnic identity. They also viewed themselves through the eyes of their peers, that is, an in-group self-identification. Therefore, they had a double-consciousness of themselves both as individuals and as a racial group. This process of double identification created a tension between these two groups that is evident in American literature, art and culture.

During the 1970s, the pattern by which African-American image and identity was shaped was similar to that of Du Bois' theory. In the 1970s, literature, television and the cinema were the primary means of information for the people, and they still "remain a powerful presence in U.S. culture" (Anastasio and Chapman 152) today. African-American people have generally been invisible in the white American culture but "in the late 1960s and early 1970s we begin to find [...] black families in television drama" (Barker 77) and films. The image of the African-American people produced by the white American films, television series and by the literature of the time continued to be influenced by the colonial and plantation stereotypes about black people prevalent since the after-slavery years artistic and literary production in the 18th and 19th centuries. Such literary examples are Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) or Harriet Ann Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). African-Americans were depicted according to the stereotypes of the submissive "Tom," the gambler "Coon," the "Tragic Mulatto," the "Mammy" and the violent, bad "Buck." The plots might be on contemporary issues but the characters were still shaped according to the stereotypes of the past. Moreover, black people were usually represented either as victims of abuse by white racist men or as criminals, having drug problems or in general as being problematic to the white American society. During that period one finds in film, television and literature plots, teenage African-American characters associated with violence, crime, drugs and guns which led to the emergence of the dangerous black ghetto image which influenced the way black identity was perceived.

On the other hand, African-American people shaping their own image in films, television and literature make an effort to overcome the stereotypes and form a new image and identity for themselves. The depiction of African-American people by African-American authors, screen writers and directors, apart from the influence of the white American perspective, was also influenced by the Black Arts Movement that spanned from approximately the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s.

The Black Arts Movement emerged out of the empowerment that African-American people experienced during the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, and it advocated the empowerment of black people through the promotion of their own culture as well as the return of black people to their roots. African-American artists and writers were seeking to promote black literature and culture, demonstrate the important part of American art, literature and culture as well as create a Black Aesthetic. Many people of color became vital cultural ancestors to the Black Arts Movement, which embedded as a core tenet the Black Aesthetics during the 1960s and 1970s. This movement sought to create art forms capable of expressing the varieties of black experience in the U.S. Black people began

to appreciate and embrace their African heritage and the most characteristic motto of the movement was that “Black is beautiful.” During this period African-American people adopted a style that they believed to be more suitable to their African identity. Through the folk expression emerged a distinct African-American style, culture, art and literature. Moreover, during the 1970s, jazz, soul and blues music were established as African-American music and there were also visual works of art which alluded to Africa and the African background of the African-American people. It was also considered necessary for every black person to have visited his/her ancestor’s land, that is Africa, at least once.

The Black Arts Movement: Lorenzo Thomas

During the Black Arts Movement there were many African-American people who employed their art in order to make political comments and claims. Lorenzo Thomas, for instance, was in favor of the premeditated use of language both in literature and in everyday life, a quality that, as he upheld, enables poetry to be used as surrogate for political speech. He talked about the political role that poetry readings held during the Black Arts Movement claiming that “art is—and should be—a political act” (Thomas 308). According to Lorenzo Thomas, poetry readings were employed in order to raise the political consciousness of African-American people coming from various educational and societal backgrounds. Art is a medium that is accessible to the masses and thus, through the medium of art, black people attempted to pass their message to America and bring about change. During the Black Arts Movement, art was used by black artists as a means of conducting their political struggle of equality and equal representation of the African-American people. Lorenzo Thomas employed the poetic form in order to address certain political concerns, that of African-American representation and identification with the white American culture.

In his poetry collection *Chances Are Few*, Lorenzo Thomas approaches the issue of black people’s double consciousness by depicting the confusion that black people experienced, and he also attempts to clarify it by exploring the true nature of black identity. Thomas, being an African-American born in Panama but raised in New York, had a different experience of blackness than those born in the U.S. mainland and in his poems he inserts some elements coming from his own personal experience, in an attempt to place blackness within a more globalized context. Here, apart from his own poems, Thomas has also included his English versions of poems by Roberto MacKay and Leon Damas. In doing so, he presents a more globalized worldview of African-American people, which is not restricted to the reality and everyday life of black people in the U.S.A.

To begin with, Thomas’ poem “Hiccups” opens with the epigraph “after Leon Damas” (*Chances Are Few* 63) and therefore, one may assume that this is Thomas’ version of one of Damas’ poems. Damas, being himself a French poet with African-American origins, had a different kind of African-American experience similarly to Thomas, who was born in Panama but raised in the USA. Thomas was interested in expanding African-American experience by recording the black experience that is not strictly relevant to slavery or the Civil Rights movement. His aim was to include the experience of those black people who came to America after that period, as well. Thomas believed that “understanding African American poetry of any era requires an ability to hear ‘the whole voice’” (*Extraordinary Measures* 4). Thus, in order to understand the African-American experience and identity, one must have the total picture and not focus on certain parts of it. For Thomas, African-American people are not only the descendants of the slaves who were brought to America in the 17th century, but also the descendants of the African-Americans who immigrated to America, coming from various places at various periods. Through his poetry, he attempts to establish an integral African-American experience and bring forward the new African-American identity that emerges from it. In “Hiccups,” Thomas explores the issues of black identity and experience as expressed through culture in the post-modern America of the 1970s.

Thomas Lorenzo and Postmodernity

Art, literature and culture in the postmodern era are characterized by fluidity and experimentation. New media and new forms of art emerge which affect and alter both the artistic and the literary practice. Writers and artists attempt to move beyond limitations imposed on them by race, gender and class and beyond conventions. All the grand narratives are questioned and writers move beyond the conventions of form and style in writing. They employ less elaborate language and techniques in order to be closer to the readers. In order to do so, they often subvert the elitist techniques of modernism, and irony and parody prevail in most postmodern texts. Thus, grand notions of the past such as identity, history and culture are decomposed in order to be reformulated to include a broader scope of meaning and importance. Readers now feel closer to the writer, the text and the issues touched upon in postmodern works.

The influence of postmodern theory is evident in Thomas' writing as well as in the techniques he employs in his poetry collection. Thomas, in his poems, resorts to the use of free verse, the lack of punctuation and para-textual elements such as dedications, references to other poets and sketches. He employs various language styles, such as Standard English and black dialect, which may often be juxtaposed in his poems in order to create a certain effect. In his poems, there are no full stops and there are only a few commas, there are also gaps between words which, along with the varying length of the lines, indicate the way the poet's breathing pattern fluctuates. It is obvious that for Thomas the poets and the readers are also media of poetic expression as their body language, facial expressions and voice, while reading a poem, become part of it. With regard to language use, he also brings into his poems words from the French language juxtaposed to the English ones, as in "Hiccups," and onomatopoeic words, as in "The Marvelous Land of Indefinitions," which create an ironic effect. His reference to other poets creates the effect of a community of texts that are juxtaposed, or the effect that his poems are conversing with those of the poets he brings into his own. His references to other poets and artists also offer a multiplicity of perspectives within his poems, which adds to the expanded African-American identity Thomas attempts to promote. As far as the sketch is concerned, it is a still, a particular moment in time that is frozen and allows the reader/viewer to zoom in or out and pay attention to the details that people overlook in their everyday life. It also consists of a visual rendering of the poem, which is also another poetic medium that Lorenzo employs in order to profess that poetry is not only about words and letters on paper. On the other hand, a frame can limit one's perspective as it depicts only one moment and not the whole picture. Therefore, Thomas urges his readers to pay attention to the details but always try to look at the whole picture and not fixate on one specific detail. All these techniques further enhance his beliefs of an extended African-American experience, as they dissuade the readers to view his poems as fitting into boxes and labels, but from a wide spectrum of multiple perspectives.

The title of the poem, "Hiccups," indicates an action that is repeated in a constant rate and one that is involuntary, as in the case of a person actually suffering from hiccups. The persona recalls his "childhood infancy/ In a hiccup sequence/ hiccup hiccup Pope pap hiccup hiccup" (3-5). By resorting to the memories of the persona's childhood, Thomas touches upon the problems and dilemmas an African-American faces in his life beginning with his childhood. The repetition of the word "hiccup" creates a sense of musicality of speech which connotes the dominant presence of music culture in the life of African-Americans, rendering music to be an intrinsic part of black culture and identity. The persona identifies the rhythm of hiccup as "jazz playing" (Hiccup 54). Thus, music can be a medium of poetry in the sense that it can materialize both the poetic language and its rhythm and musicality.

Jazz music is considered to be an important issue expressing the views of the Black Arts movement on the promotion of an intrinsically black culture. Aldon Lynn Nielsen maintains that "jazz has been created by African Americans" (175). It is therefore an original and intrinsic part of African-American culture. Nielsen also argues that there is an "extensive body of recordings of avant-garde jazz works incorporating poetry by black writers" (176). Thus, jazz music and poetry have been connected and intertwined for a

long time and there is a substantial amount of such works attesting to their existence. As Thomas professes in his essay *"Classical Jazz" and the Black Arts Movement*, "the Black Arts Movement sought to identify a certain intrinsic beauty and vitality in African American authenticity. This view particularly affected the way that Black Arts Movement writers dealt with jazz" (237).

Therefore, jazz music and culture have been established as part of the "authentic" African-American identity.

The persona recalls the influence that music exercised on the formation of his identity early on in his childhood, when he identified with jazz music and the banjo, and he did not want to play the violin like his mother wanted him to. Black people living in America after the 1960s, having intense memories of the segregation and discrimination they suffered in previous years, wished for their children's assimilation in and acceptance by white America in order to avoid their experience of discrimination. Thus, they urged their children to embrace white culture, a view expressed by Thomas through the reference to different musical instruments and music genres in this poem. The persona recalls being resistant to white culture by not wanting to go to his violin lessons, but being keen on learning to play the banjo:

NO HOOKY
PLAYING
I remember it again it comes to me:
Your *violin* lessons!
A banjo
You say a banjo
How you say it
A banjo you say,
"Good... a banjo" (70-76)

In the above excerpt, the persona remembers what his mother used to tell him every time he wanted to avoid his piano lessons and reports to the readers her exact words. The capital letters create the impression that this child's mother is yelling at him as if she is scolding him. The persona does not want to go to his violin lessons and he skips them, but his mother disapproves of it. One may infer that the child in the poem stands for the black people in the 1970s, who wanted to maintain a distinct African-American identity, being in touch with their roots and their African culture, but who faced the pressure of white American culture which "demanded" their full assimilation. This is inferred by the persona's wish to play the banjo, which is a traditional African instrument, while his mother wants him to identify with white American culture signified by the violin lessons. This could also highlight another inner conflict that African-American people experienced due to their dual identity of being both African and Americans. Trying to identify with two cultures also created a tension between them generated by their hegemonic relationship. This tension was a characteristic of the entire American culture manifested in all the facets of cultural media. David Holloway and John Beck mention that

[d]uring the 1960s and the 1970s the position of dissent within the machinery of capitalist-democratic visual culture on one hand, and the representation and reproduction on the other (feminism, the Civil Rights movement, black power, the antiwar movement, "New Hollywood," a politicized artistic neo-avant-garde) was complex and frequently contradictory. (162)

But this contradiction was always present regarding African-American and white American cultures. This conflict resulted in the obstruction of the identification of black people with one or both of these cultural identities. Thomas, in his poems, brings forward this tension in order to demonstrate the impact it had on the formation of an authentic African-American identity. For instance, the persona in the poem faces this

conflict when his mother's wishes clash with his own, which leads to his being confused as regards his identity.

Moreover, Thomas touches upon the labels that had been ascribed on African-American people, such as the stereotypical beliefs of blacks being less civilized than white Americans, or having no manners and being brutes. The persona argues that his "mother gave her son good table manners/A fork is not a toothpick!" (7-8). It is as if the persona is defending himself against the stereotype of the brute "Black." This attempt to alter the negative image of African-American people promoted by white culture, is contrasted to the para-textual illustration of a television set embedded in the poem on page 66 of the collection. This illustration is also part of Lorenzo Thomas' poem and he employs it here to make evident the power that image exerts over words. The television is a very powerful means of information, propaganda and image making. It can create, shift and influence people's opinions and impressions on everything and thus, whoever possesses control of this medium, also possesses a lot of power. It was and still remains the leading medium by which people form their views of the world and others, and it was also the medium by which most of the stereotypical ideas about black people were established in the U.S.A. This was done via films, television shows and the news.

One of the themes that Thomas tackles in his poetry is that of textuality and the forms it may take in order to support the work of an author. Thomas' work echoes Gérard Genette and Marie Macleanon's views about what a literary work should consist of. Genette and Macleanon claim that "[t]he literary work consists exhaustively or essentially, of a text... But this text rarely appears in its naked state, without reinforcement and accompaniment of a certain number of productions, themselves verbal or not, like an author's name, a title, a preface, illustrations" (261).

So, Thomas inserts in his text names of jazz artists and black poets like "Otis" (56), referring to Johnny Otis—a great jazz musician—, or Leon Damas, something that, combined with the title and the illustration, highlights the various textual layers contained in the poem, which enhances its overall meaning. This kind of para-textual effect employed by Thomas exposes the hegemonies built in the way information reaches readers or audiences and shapes their beliefs, which is where the irony in Thomas's writing can be detected. Therefore, this illustration embedded in the text is a direct comment—a poignant comment if I may say—on the power that television or media exerts on the process of shaping people's beliefs and perceptions. As television also depicts only frames of events and not the complete events, it limits people's knowledge about what has occurred, thus affecting their perspectives. In the middle of this illustration there is the line "NEGRO HEAD shrimp" (78). It is the image that the white-dominating cultural medium of television promotes about black people, as having small heads, meaning that they are mentally inferior to the whites. This offers an insight into the downgrading mentality that white American culture adopted towards black people and culture. Summing up, in "Hiccups" Thomas argues that African-American people in America in the 1970s were confronted with an inner conflict and a confusion of identity that was further enhanced by the perplexing attitude white American culture promoted about African-American people.

This ambiguity pertaining to African-American identity in American culture and media is also inherent in Thomas's poem "The Marvelous Land of Indefinitions." He believed that poetry should touch upon real life issues and problems and that the primary role of the African-American poet is to strive to instill the knowledge of African-American identity among black people. Thomas also believed that the poet should be in touch with people and not isolated, in order to be able to expose the virtues and the vices of the society he lives in. Thomas, being driven by his personal experience as an African-American, professed that the "African-American poet in the twentieth century has maintained a vision rooted in an Afrocentric knowledge of self and community" (*Extraordinary Measures* 235). He argues, thus, for an Afrocentric identity, one formed by African-American people and centered upon their African heritage. He is interested in encouraging black people to focus on shaping a common point of reference that derives from their shared African heritage, rather than attempting to identify with a restrictive African-white-American

experience. Thomas, once more, brings into his poem certain para-textual elements, such as an epigraph, or products of the white culture like "Coca-Cola" (79) and "Viceroy's" (79). The epigraph of this poem by Ricardo Miro, which writes "[t]he poet's business is telling the truth" (78), is contrasted to the title of the poem that talks about indefinitions. It appears that both the title and the epigraph are intended to function as an introduction to the poem, as they inform the readers about the themes it deals with. Thomas claims that, even though the role of the poet should be to expose the truth to readers, sometimes literature and art have contributed to the exact opposite, that of obscuring the truth. Likewise, there have been literary and artistic works that perpetuated a fallible depiction of African-American people.

In "The Marvelous Land of Indefinitions," Thomas criticizes the use of poetry merely for aesthetic pleasure, as he claims that this kind of poetry addresses only a small part of the American society, that is the elite, and it does not address the problems of the working classes. He addresses the above issue in these lines: "We have gathered to read and listen to poems/ As if everyone were actually equal" (3-4). The diversity of the audience denotes the audience's varying interests and problems, and therefore, this kind of poetry cannot be about definite issues that have to do with realistic problems and situations because, as Thomas claims, "poeting with poor people doesn't end poverty" (8). Poetry in itself will not solve the problems but it should awaken people's consciousness and lead them to action. The experience depicted in such poems is restricted only to the hegemonic classes of America. These classes refer to white people who do not face any problems, as "poetry is the 'nectar of the gods'" (23) and black people who belong to the lower classes are preoccupied with "security. The kids/Daily bread" (69-70). As a result, they cannot identify with a kind of poetry which is only intended to please because they need a kind of poetry that addresses their everyday problems, a kind of poetry that celebrates "African-American kinship and strong moral families and communities" (Thomas 303).

Thomas, thus, argues that black people have been invisible in the white culture and ignored by readers and audience, being thus unable to identify with the white American culture. He also claims that this accumulation of superficial poetry readings is similar to people drinking Coca-Cola or smoking Viceroy's, an everyday habit that people do without thinking. In addition to that, Coca-Cola and Viceroy's are both products that people consume and thus Thomas alleges that people in these elitist poetry readings consume poetry as they consume any other product, turning thus poetry and art into a commodity. Thomas believed that poetry has a deeper meaning and its role is to bring forward the truth about serious socio-political issues. Poetry, for him, is not something to be examined only on the surface but, on the contrary, readers should look into the deep layers of poetry to find the true meaning of a poet's words. Thus, poetry is not something that readers should consume as a commodity; it is the trigger for deeper thinking and contemplation on tantalizing socio-political issues.

Moreover, Thomas contends that mass media, poetry and art have perpetuated a clichéd image as regards African-American people. In his poem, he argues that "[n]ewspaper headlines are full of lies/ And the radio is full of lies/ AND POETRY IS FULL OF LIES!" (42-44). The elitist poetry that follows all conventions and is only meant to please can only be, according to Thomas, an artifice as it does not "tell the truth," like Miro claims in his epigraph. Thomas maintains that literature and culture have been perpetuating lies and, therefore, one cannot locate the truth behind them. The image of black Americans constructed by white media is a false one and this is the source of the confusion that African-American people feel as regards their identity. The image in question is one of exploitation of the "farm workers" (74) and the image of young black people as drug addicts being "lost in marijuana and 'free love'" (77). Therefore, it is also the media that is responsible for the "indefinition" of black identity, since it perpetuates certain racist attitudes and stereotypes as regards African-American people. In a society where "everyone prefers blonds and white folks" (80) and "the gringos don't worry themselves about anybody" (83), black people have to fight against all these preconceived ideas that are held by white American culture about them. As Kadiatu Kanneh observes, "the limits of cultures, or 'races,' are not always detected internally, but often result

from discourses and practices of power; from institutional, collective victimization" (180). Therefore, the limits of African-American people and their culture lie in the discourse between black and white cultures, a discourse that is political because it is characterized by the exertion of power of the hegemonic white culture on the intimidated black culture. This imbalanced power relation can be traced in the collective victimization of black people in America, that has been established and exercised through the institution of slavery. In this poem Thomas highlights the invisibility of black people in American culture and the perpetuation of a false negative image about them that serves to the sustenance of the power white America exerts on them.

In "Class Action," Thomas continues to explore the various portrayals of African-Americans and, as in "Hiccups," he also attempts to demonstrate the connection of blues and jazz music to black culture and identity. An interesting technique he employs, in order to comment on the relation of black people to white American culture and history, is the use of the wallpaper as a symbol standing for black people. Thomas intends to create a parallel between the status of African-American people in America and that of the wallpaper in a Film House, and through this parallelism, he will attempt to address the difference of black depiction in white and black American films. He offers the reader the opportunity to witness the way that both black and white people portray African-American people in their films and, through a comparison between the two, the readers may come to their own conclusions regarding this issue. Moreover, Thomas argues for the importance of jazz music and the blues in the formation of a distinct African-American aesthetic and a distinct African-American voice, which amounts to the process by which black people shape their identity. Throughout the poem "Class Action," he argues that black people and wallpapers share certain characteristics and similarities. For instance, the wallpaper in a Cinema Theater is something one barely notices since it is not the dominant element in the room. Similarly to the wallpaper, black people in America have been marginal, that is, they have been overlooked by white America as Thomas asserts in his poem, "[n]obody gives a damn what niggers say" (86). None pays attention to African-American people who do not have a voice of their own, so Thomas concludes that "[w]e are the wallpaper" (94). I am of the belief that, by the use of the wallpaper image, Thomas argues that black people have been trapped behind its pattern, that is, behind the stereotypical and standardized way others see them. He believes that, similarly to the wallpaper pattern that people ignore as being insignificant, African-American people have been ignored and marginalized as well, taken at face value, and none is willing to look closer at them, to bring on to the surface all their qualities. This kind of marginalization prevents African-Americans from wanting to be acknowledged as parts of white America, since it is white America who has segregated them. Anne Firor Scott appears to share the same belief with Thomas, as she maintains that "[b]lack people (except as slaves) were long invisible" (8). It seems ironic that black people were only visible as slaves, and thus as non-persons, since as slaves they were only identified by the name of their master, which consequently leads to the realization that their identity was non-existent, as it was reduced to a mere property item. Moreover, Thomas argues that America has designed the image of black people like one designs the patterns on a wallpaper: "Like wallpaper America designs/ Ourselves/ Projections in the dark/ Children of genius whose inventions/ Include the ferris wheel, Passing the buck" (136-41). At this point the tone of the poem becomes sarcastic, as Thomas makes poignant comments on the clichéd depiction of African-American people as the "Buck," or as people of low intelligence, since the greatest invention a black person could construct is the ferris wheel, which connotes that black people are not capable of innovative thinking that would advance cultural heritage.

Furthermore, Thomas offers two different but clichéd depictions of African-American people, two viewings from two different perspectives, that of black and that of white people, respectively. Thomas believes that African-Americans have been silent as regards their dislike to the clichéd images perpetuated by white America about them. He argues that "the spirits pout" (Thomas 99) when they realize that black

people maintain a passive stance towards this depiction. It appears that, by these “spirits,” Thomas wishes to refer to the spirits of Africa and thus to the African heritage of black people. In the poem, he writes:

While spirits pout, we others spot and fade
 Spinning with fortune like unspooling film
 Unleashing great comedians and pissed-off heroes,
 Doomed ingénues expiring without perspiring
 In molten gardens filled with sighs and silent
 Movie glances. (99-104)

Consequently, African spirits are “outraged” because black people, not only accept passively the demeaning depictions that white culture constructs for them, but they are also responsible for the perpetuation of certain images about their own race. Therefore, one may infer that it is black people themselves who reproduce the clichéd images of the victim, the comic character and the enraged and dangerous one about their own people. On the other hand, white people depict blackness as a mere external or decorative factor. Thomas claims that,

In Africa, the spirits gad about like niggers
 Long, shiny shone shoes! Amazing limousines
 With music blasting speeding to heaven and back. (157-59)

Thomas professes that black people had good lives and all the privileges of their communities when they were in Africa and they lost all that by being brought to America by force. When they were brought to America, white people immediately attempted to erase their cultural identity by trying to “tame” them and by giving to them white people’s clothes to wear. Naturally, that image was odd and ridiculous and it signaled the beginning of the ridicule of black people in America. Shane White and Graham White contend that the process of enforcing upon black people of a European (and controlled) identity began upon the arrival of new slaves in America. They argue that “newly arrived African slaves were quickly clothed in European garb and made to conform to European concepts of decency” (White and White 6). Thus, upon arriving in America, black people were prevented from maintaining anything that connected them to their African heritage. It seems to me that black people’s confusion regarding their identity is only a natural outcome of centuries of brainwashing into a strictly white American culture and way of thinking.

Finally, in “Class Action” Thomas also touches upon the issue of the importance of jazz music and the blues in African-American culture and identity. He believed in the power of the oral language over the written, as the written form of poems served for him as guidelines by which one could reread them. He argued that the poem on the page should function as a music score left for its later reproductions. According to Nielsen, Thomas

has viewed the printing of the poem as a performance piece. It is simply not the case, in his view, that the poem exists only as spoken performance (the print being reduced to a set of instructions for the performance), nor that there is a strict separation between the written poem and an oral realization. [...] Thomas turned to jazz for an analogy to explain his conception of the poem as practice. (152)

So, Thomas parallels jazz music to poetry and therefore, as far as black culture is concerned, jazz and poetry are closely linked. Black people, over the years, have employed poetry and music on several occasions, in order to make their voice heard, from the slavery songs of the 17th century, to the hip hop music of the 20th and 21st centuries. Music has been part of African-American culture since their arrival in

America and therefore, one can argue that there is a distinct African-American music that has been formed over the centuries and it comprises an inseparable part of African-American identity.

In "Class Action," Thomas characterizes jazz music as the process by which the uneducated black people think and voice their thoughts because, unlike poetry, jazz can be understood and appreciated by people of all educational backgrounds. Nielsen argues that "poets and jazz artists have generally tended to choose texts that seem most 'accessible' to a listening audience, perhaps out of a concern that a more 'difficult' poem might be lost in the music" (200).

Artists used simple language not only for reasons of understanding, but mostly because they wanted to place more emphasis on the words of the poem and less on its rhythm.

In his essay "Neon Griot: The Functional Role of Poetry Readings in the Black Arts Movement," Thomas upholds that jazz music and jazz poetry emerged out of the attempt of the Black Arts Movement to bring art close to the people and, at the same time, to promote an authentic black culture and invent an authentic black voice. Following up from these lines, Thomas claims in his poems that "[u]nlettered negroes called this logic jazz/ Relating thought to life, love to projection/ Spirit entertained by spirit /as in life / And when the movies chose to speak/ the voice was jazz" ("Class Action" 189).

Thus, jazz culture for Thomas is related to the life and the spirit of African-American people and to the moment when black people decided to begin expressing themselves through a distinct African-American voice, which is what jazz music signifies for them.

William Van Deburg addresses the issue of the importance of music during the Black Arts and the Black Power Movement and he also explores its political nature. Van Deburg expresses the opinion that black artists during this period of political upheaval, "[t]hrough their musical messages and dynamic performance style, they both mirrored and directed the people's struggles for empowerment" (215). Throughout time, it was the black artists, who, being able to address a large public, have always been responsible for awakening black people's consciousness and inciting them to act. Black artists were also the ones who, via their portrayal of black people, contributed to the shaping of a positive African-American image and identity either by projecting a positive image of black people, or by ridiculing the clichéd image that white America has shaped for them.

Conclusions

To conclude, in the 1970s America, black people are still confused about their identity, but poets such as Lorenzo Thomas have undertaken the task to unravel this confusion. Black people seem to be unable to identify either with their black or their white heritage, as they are placed somewhere in between. It appears that, even 80 years since Du Bois' theory of "double consciousness," black people still view themselves through the veil. All three poems touch upon the inner conflict that black people feel as far as their identity is concerned. This inner conflict derives from the tensioned relationship between the black and white cultures that have always been in a battle for power. Thomas revisits the clichéd images of black people in order to comment on them and expose their artificial nature, as well as demonstrate the negative impact they have had on the way black people view themselves. He maintains that the mass media have perpetuated this artificial image of black people and exposes them as a means of propaganda by the hegemonic white culture. This negative depiction has resulted in an inner conflict for black people who are torn between their American identity and their African heritage. Therefore, although it appears that he perpetuated the stereotypical depictions of black people, he actually tried to expose the truth behind the myths, so as to demonstrate that they have remained in touch with their African identity and cultural heritage, by establishing an inherently African-American cultural identity through music. So, jazz music and the blues are presented as the authentic voice of the black people. Lorenzo Thomas brings forward the image of African-Americans, who, having balanced between their African and their American

identities, are able to get rid of all the labels that have been ascribed to black identity. Through the voice of such a persona, he overcomes one by one all the stereotypical images black people have been bound to, through a process of elimination. Bringing down one by one the arguments by which black people have been restrained in the margins of America, he intends to reposition them at the center of the American society.

Nowadays, although African-American people have fully come to terms with and maintained their African-American identity, they still remain at the margins of the American society. African-American people are still victims of white people's violence, as there are several attacks a year against black people by white policemen. The most recent example is the Ferguson case, where a young boy was shot dead by the police, despite the fact that he was not an immediate threat. Moreover, not even famous and well-established black people get the recognition they deserve. These days, there is great controversy over the fact that no people of color are nominated for the Oscar awards. On the other hand, America has its first black president. Barack Obama's election as the President of the U.S.A. has brought a lot of hope to all minorities in the U.S., but it seems that this has not changed many things in the American society. All in all, the years may have passed but African-American people have still a long way to go to reach the center of the American society. It is true, though, that more and more people of color are rising in the political and scientific hierarchy of the U.S. creating hope for the future.

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“The Hour of Exemplary Love”: Gypsiness and Romanian Poetry

Abstract: Romanian poets’ literary interest in Gypsiness emerged at the beginning of the 19th century with the singular epic poem entitled *The Gypsyiad*, by Ion Budai-Deleanu. Determined or not by socio-political circumstances, a number of other Romanian poets have been inspired by the ethno-racial particularities of the Gypsies ever since. Recent research shows that the image of the Gypsy in Romanian literature in general has differed from that in Western literature. This article explores a selection of poems related to Gypsiness, whose substance and subject vary significantly from one epoch to another, and argues that the early 20th century focus on ethnicity and race diminished during the communist regime, because of its rather assimilationist cultural politics, to eventually reach a budding plurality after 1989. More specifically, it examines the roles of poetry in blurring the color line⁷ between Gypsy and Romanian subjectivities and in reconfiguring Roma/Gypsy or mixed identities through poetry over the last decades of democratic regimes.

Keywords: Romanian poetry, Gypsy or Roma identity and culture, *The Gypsyiad*, color line, democratic regimes

Introduction

Recent comparative studies on the image of the Gypsy in Romanian and in European literature show that the Romanian literary discourse has been slightly different from the Western one. While the West has produced two perspectives on the Gypsy character—one connected with marginality and one related to the exotic—, in Romanian literature marginality dominates the discourse. While the Western range of Gypsy characters often includes idealized figures, the characters in Romanian high literature and folklore are more realistic and constructed on the binary opposition familiar/strange.⁸ Indeed, although the attitude of the Romanian elite has been to ignore or to develop an ambivalent stance regarding Gypsiness, the discrepancy between the history of social exclusion and the presence of Gypsy characters, culture and spirituality in the aesthetic domain has not been as high as in the West. More than 800 years of cohabitation between the local traditional communities and the migratory Gypsy tribes in Eastern Europe have created such a tight relationship, that Gypsiness is too close to be considered exotic and most fictional characters are often similar to the real Gypsies, whose social status has varied from one regime to another. In the context of balkanization⁹—understood as a specific and local form of cultural hybridity—romanianization and gypsization have been socio-cultural processes that have gone hand in hand, yet in different manners and proportions and with different effects on each side. Although cultural hybridity should be based on mutuality and a third space of negotiation, it often lacks balance and the neutrality of the third space remains just an ideal. While many excellent works by Romanian authors tackle subjects

⁷ In sociology, the concept of color line designates the social separation of racial groups within a community, an abstract discriminatory barrier created by custom, economic different background or law. It is used here only in relation to poetry and poetry authorship

⁸ See two recent doctoral theses by Pavel Cristian Suci (2010) and by Laura Popescu (2010).

⁹ Călin Crăciun (2013) has shown that Romanian literature and criticism has been too Western so far and argued that the archaic and Balkanic spiritual strands have played equally important roles.

connected with Gypsiness, the number of Gypsy authors—or Roma, if we consider the Roma social activism of the last two decades—is very small in Romania for numerous reasons such as: the mainly oral character of Romani language before 1989, which, however, has changed lately due to the introduction of new academic programmes; the relative lack of education among the Roma population, in spite of assiduous affirmative campaigns; the preference of many educated Roma from mixed marriages to draw a veil over their ancestry; the rather transnational character of the current Roma literary canon; the difficulty of assuming an identity which is frequently demonized by mass media and public opinion et cetera.

Taking such contextual details into account, this essay explores the role of poetry as an aesthetic mirror in dealing with socio-cultural matters, in projecting modern views on otherness and identity and in reconsidering the nature of the national literary canon. In particular, it discusses the modes in which a number of Romanian poets interpret the cultural politics regarding the Roma/Gypsy, characteristic to different historical epochs. It reviews a range of attitudes to Gypsy culture, several possible causes and effects, plus their social, cultural and ethnologic meaning. It starts from *The Gypsyiad* (1800) by Ion Budai-Deleanu, continues with several poetic productions from the 20th century and ends with post-1989 poems by Roma and non-Roma authors.

Ion Budai-Deleanu: *The Gypsyiad*

Long before poet Mihai Eminescu composed his masterpieces, the son of a countryside priest from Transylvania, Ion Budai-Deleanu, wrote the epic poem *The Gypsyiad* (1800), yet not published before his death in 1820. Discovered only after about half a century, the manuscript began to attract its first literary critics. Budai-Deleanu was a writer very aware of the post-French Revolution social, political and cultural context and he had the intuition and the talent to design such “a toy”¹⁰—as he called his work—that approaches significant issues related to cultural identity and otherness. In line with future Romanticism, he did not ignore folklore, especially that type concerning the relationship between Romanians and Gypsies. However, most of our contemporary historians and literary critics agree that the political conditions of Transylvania in the first half of the 19th century constitute the main reason why Budai-Deleanu’s work would have meant too much for the Romanian elite. His socio-political, ethno-cultural satire would have been unbearable for the local boyars and equivalent to a cultural revolution in one of the provinces of the Austrian Empire.¹¹ Nonetheless, following the classic moralist Western fashion and drawing on Homer, Budai-Deleanu conceived a world described as “the white Gypsihood.” Thus, from a socio-cultural perspective, he attempted to reveal Gypsies’ humanity and heroism and, simultaneously, to criticize the local clergy’s mentality and lifestyle.

The critical reception of *The Gypsyiad* has varied from one epoch to another. Critics often judged Budai-Deleanu’s fictional Gypsies by comparing them with the real ones or even ignored their positive Gypsiness, being preponderantly interested in the aesthetics of the work itself and less ready to admit its cultural, social and political implications. For example, Cornel Regman (1939) praised the “realism, power of portrayal and satirical observation in depicting the Gypsy people”, while commenting upon “the hugely

¹⁰ Except when mentioned, the translation of the Romanian texts was made by the author of this article.

¹¹ As the contemporary Romanian historian Sorin Mitu (1997) shows, the Romanian discourse on national identity in the 19th century was constructed through a specific type of comparison to other ethnic groups: the comparison of the Romanians to the Gypsies had a double meaning. Whereas for Timotei Cipariu, one of the fathers of Romanian philology, being compared to the Gypsies meant the worst that could have happened, Simion Bărnuțiu, one of the main organizers of the 1848 Revolution, made the comparison in order to say that Romanians were as oppressed and discriminated as the Gypsies. Both trends generated mainly negative self-images among the Romanian elite, because the Gypsies’ cultural identity involved a high degree of transnationality, which did not suit the national ideal of the 19th century. The shame of being Romanian was thus projected on the Gypsies.

grotesque idea of asking the Gypsies to conceive their own country.”¹² His remarks, made just a few years before the concentration camps, reflect the interwar gap between ethics and aesthetics related to the presence of the Gypsy in Romanian literature. Nicolae Manolescu (2008) argues that *The Gypsyiad* is a baroque work on the theme of human condition, similar to the epic poems of the Italian Renaissance and to *Don Quixote*, rather than simply a comic epic poem, as some critics considered before 1989. He also rejects its merely ethnic character, previously invoked by the literary critic George Călinescu. However, like Călinescu, Manolescu appreciates more its aesthetics rather than its ethical content, considering it “an epic poem of literature itself rather than one about Gypsies,” because, indeed, its complex structure displays a large number of literary techniques. Yet, there are some critics, such as Ovidiu Pecican,¹³ who claim that Budai-Deleanu’s work is “a socio-political manifest whose radicalism surpasses any plan or political strategy of the epoch” and “a political pamphlet under the guise of a fable.” Other commentators point out its underlying mysticism and occultism, masonic symbolism and folk magic, which make sense as a set of subversive ideas in the context of the Habsburgic despotism and as a form of survival.¹⁴ Insisting on the values of democracy, the postcommunist transitional regimes made possible no less than three “translations” from the Romanian language of the 19th century into the language of the contemporary reader. The best of them, signed by Traian Ștef, is a prose rewriting of *The Gypsyiad* and, unlike the other two versions, preserves the dialogic meaning of the footnotes. Traian Ștef denies too that *The Gypsyiad* is simply a comic piece of writing and describes it as “that folly of foundation which makes us shudder.”¹⁵

Taking all these perspectives into consideration, *The Gypsyiad* emerges as a unique visionary epic poem, which combines elements of interest to cultural studies and promotes universalist, humanist values, and does not exclude the idea of failure, as a condition for progress. Although the title implies a series of adventures in which mainly Gypsies are involved, the overall picture is carnivalesque and centered on a concealing type of cultural hybridity rather than on revealing Gypsies’ real socio-political situation at the beginning of the 19th century, a trend which has continued over the decades, up to the present.

Twenty-century Romanian Poetry on Gypsiness

In the 20th century, there were several poets who wrote about Gypsiness and its relationship with the majority: some authors adopted ethnic and anthropologic perspectives (Octavian Goga, Tudor Arghezi, Rady Gyr, Nichita Stănescu), while others preferred a more abstract or syncretic poetic style (Nichita Stănescu, Gellu Naum, Gabriela Melinescu). While the former perspective is more essentialist and is

¹² See the collection of essays coordinated by Irina Petraș (2010).

¹³ Idem

¹⁴ For instance, Radu Cernătescu (2010) reminds us that at that time all masons considered themselves “symbolic slaves” (Ro. *robi*), in order to cast a Christian dimension to their ideals of egalitarianism and freedom. The resurrection of Parpangel as a modern local folkloric hero dwells on a type of syncretism that combines several symbolic threads and a “‘fraternal’ discourse” based on the Masonic discourse of the Enlightenment.

¹⁵ However, what is a little intriguing in his foreword to the translation is that he reiterates the negative stereotype that Gypsies are inferior, which I think is alarming and not in line with the current multicultural policy of integration. For example, he invokes Budai-Deleanu’s subtlety in crafting the majority of the Gypsies’ names using roots related to plants, animals or physical disabilities. In Traian Ștef’s view, these names suggest “the idea of an inferior, vegetative world,” which raises questions related to language functions, the nature/logos dichotomy and the multi-linguistic aspects of our world. In contrast to Ștef’s ideas, Radu Cernătescu indicates that the suffixes of some of the Gypsies’ names are hybrids between the Romani root -*del*, meaning “god,” and the Hebrew root -*el*, meaning “god” too (as in Corcodel, Guladel, Aordel, Jundadel), while the main character’s name, Parpanghel, would be a dissimulation of an Archangel, the leader of all these “angels.” A more honest and balanced interpretation of the names Budai-Deleanu used would be to consider Mikhail Bakhtin’s category of the carnivalesque, which considers inferiority and superiority as two equally important sides of the same larger phenomenon and is in line with the symbol of the wheel specific to Roma culture.

specific to the first part of the 20th century, the latter is rather universalist and accompanies the assimilationist cultural policy specific to the communist epoch. None of these authors were of Gypsy origin.

Among other symbolic figures of the countryside, such as the ploughmen, the teachers or the socmen, whom the Transylvanian poet Octavian Goga (1905) evokes in his debut volume, the locally famous old fiddler Laie plays a special role. Laie is both an endearing name that comes from Nicolaie and a word that designates a Gypsy camp or family. The poet describes the art of the fiddler and his empathic capacity, reveals his significant influence in the community and his bond with the natural environment. A poem about Laie's death, entitled "He died..." captures the mourning atmosphere in his family. The scene in which his wife Blackberry and their son sit beside the dead is supplemented by details that speak about poverty, sorrow and survival. It is one of the not many poems in which a Gypsy woman's thoughts are formulated. In another poem—"By Laie's Grave"—the poet expresses two aspects related to the ideas of community and nation. Laie's death is compared with a journey to better countries, while his musical skill is characterized as able to unite people. Octavian Goga imagines what might have happened with Laie's destiny in an ideal world, ruled by Christian figures: he believes Laie's songs can make God cry, which could change people's destinies.

In the years before, during and after the Second World War, there have been four collections designed on Gypsy themes. Although they have the picturesque Gypsy ethos in common, locating the characters in a marginal social position, the four collections show different poetic styles. *Mildew Flowers* (1931) by Tudor Arghezi—volume inspired by his years spent in prison, due to political reasons—includes an *ars poetica*, which dwells on the uncanny:

When my celestial nail was worn blunt and low
I wanted to let it grow
And it never grew back in place—
Or maybe I did not recognize its face.

The poem ends with a confession that might be interpreted as the poet's affinity for the left-wing cultural politics of inclusion:

It was dark. In the distance, outside, I could hear the rain.
And my hand felt like a claw through the pain,
Incapable to extend,
So I forced myself to write with the nails of my left hand.¹⁶

The collection contains poems about Gypsy women as sexually attractive in two hypostases. Firstly, "Tinca," a shortening for Catherine, is portrayed as a florist, with a "deceiving sigh," who falls prey to the jealous Năstase, a former prisoner who eventually kills her. The poem tells the rhymed story of a woman's failing attempt to transgress class boundaries and alludes to the character of the tragic mulatta existing in American literature. Secondly, "Rada" is the description of a virgin dancer, unaware she was chosen to be the poet's muse. The play upon voices here shows a progressive glide from the poet's descriptive voice to the voice of a young Gypsy man in love with the dancer. The two voices share the poem, but unfortunately the woman's voice is not heard at all.

Apart from these titles, which rather objectify the figure of the Gypsy woman, two other poems about Gypsy men envisage voiceless characters, too. "Lache" is one first name, incidentally meaning "shiftless"

¹⁶ Translated from Romanian by Lori Tiron-Pandit at: <http://www.loritironpandit.com/written/mildew-flowers-floride-mucigai-by-tudor-arghezi/>

and “passive homosexual” in Romanian slang. He has “a mute hammer,” “all his tools are unripe” and his deeds are essentially hybrid, a mishmash of skills and actions. Because of these reasons, he has been “imprisoned for one year and four months.” A second one is, in fact, a nickname: “The Saint.” The poet depicts a disabled man called Hialmar—a name with Indian resonance—whose crippled body is carried in a wheelbarrow by an old woman, and underlines the generic misunderstood silence of the Roma ethnic group: “In his tongueless voice/He mumbles the Word of the beginning.” The end of the poem marks a huge emotional distance between the viewer and the man described: “A fly was sucking the tear of his lids.” It is at least curious why Arghezi chose to depict a crippled man in the interwar years, when some of the Gypsy intellectuals gained a certain social status and public visibility. In a bitter and critical tone, he bluntly and bitterly motivates his choice in the poem itself: “Because he was born deaf-mute/Something had to be done out of him.” Other poems in the same collection focus on the general nostalgia of the lost nomadic lifestyle, the forced urbanization and the subsequent imprisonment of the nomads, for whom a serenade has become synonymous with death.

Three other collections followed Arghezi’s breakthrough: Miron Radu Paraschivescu’s *Gypsy Songs* (1941), Radu Gyr’s *Ballads* (1943) and, after the war, Nichita Stănescu’s *Slangy or Hold Up Songs* (1955). Paraschivescu’s poems are interlaced stories of love and betrayal, superfluous idylls about tenderness and jealousy, which insist on a spirit of vicinity, on interracial bonds, real or just imagined, and on continuous introspection, one of the main traits of the interwar modernist Romanian literature. Such songs are inspired by Federico García Lorca’s work and by local fiddlers’ songs, urban interethnic dramas or folklore.¹⁷ One poem entitled “Wedding Song,” subtitled “a shukar¹⁸ story,” chronicles the account of a crazy white young boyar who falls in love with a Gypsy slave, who serves the guests, and spoils his own wedding with a boyar’s daughter. The poet suggests it is not comfortable to retell such unbridled passions and what is needed is empathy and patience. Opposite situations in terms of gender and race are also taken into account. Because of the socially forbidden love for a blue-eyed girl, a Gypsy man longs for a coffin to bury his own feelings. In a similar poem—“Dead Man’s Unhappy Life”—a Gypsy man does the apology of life by imagining he could see the grief and trouble produced to his lover, while he is in his coffin. “Love Curse” portrays a pregnant Gypsy young woman who does anything she can, so that her blond lover should return to her. In the poem “Prayer,” a fiddler prays to the Virgin Mary, whom he humorously admonishes on grounds connected with social and economic inequalities. Another anti-hero is “Rică” or “the masher of Death,” a proud womanizer, a braggart whom nobody can compare with, a brave man and yet unaware of any social risks. In these poems, Paraschivescu uses the category of humor, rather in contrast with sorrow than in connection with morality. The effect is melodramatic, vaudevillian and characters appear as marionettes. Apart from the urban settings described, the collection includes a few titles related to the nomadic lifestyle. The poem “Viana” illustrates a woman’s restlessness when her man does not return to the tribe: she calms down by dancing at night surrounded only by nature. Another poem called “Posse Song” approaches the idea of marginality and of a Gypsy land as a “broken paradise,” in which their usual songs and merry making are interrupted by soldiers who persecute them. Although Ana Dobre (2011), Paraschivescu’s biographer, notes that his father was “dark skinned,” she does not draw any conclusions regarding his ethnic background. Dobre clearly describes his uneasy relationship with the Romanian communist regime of the 1950s: he initially supported its leftist cause, but eventually realized it was heading in a dangerous direction.

In Radu Gyr’s ballads, Gypsies are often represented as witnesses to old tragedies. Although the poet does not mention the names of Brâncoveanu’s family, decapitated by the Ottomans in 1714, he imagines

¹⁷ As Arthur Silvestri (2012) implies, Paraschivescu’s poems represent the urban degradation of the local Creole subjectivity, seen as foreign, imported, Western and obliterating the positive sides of outlawry. There is no typology similar to Robin Hood in M. R. Paraschivescu’s collection.

¹⁸ In the Romani language, *shukar* means “beautiful,” while in the Romanian slang, it can also mean “scandalous.”

the power of a Gypsy old woman to predict the massacre, in the poem "The Cowry's Ballad of Death in Tsarigrad." After the tragedy, she is considered a manipulator, a mad woman and is summoned to throw away her cowry. A similar position of the Gypsy character is found in "The Ballad of the Forest of No Haidouks," in which haidouk lancu addresses the "baragladinas" or the "pharaohs," as Gypsies used to be dubbed, claiming he is not afraid of being hanged. The poem evokes the haidouk's disappointment when he sees that the people he was fighting for—slaves and serfs—are those who fit the loose on his neck, which hints at the difficulties encountered by those who dreamt of a better life for the wretched. In a ballad which captures the moral decay of the local boyars—"The Ballad of a Winter Night"—a Gypsy coachman gradually witnesses a boyar's jealousy and eventual crime against his own wife. The Gypsy man is not speechless, as it occurs in other ballads, but he is curious to learn about the boyar's grief and tries to calm him down, in spite of being treated quite badly: he is called "worthless servant," "mean coachman" and "thick-lipped pharaoh." The poem reveals the Gypsy man is caught between being a good servant and obeying his master's terrible orders, on the one hand, and his own moral sense and spiritual awakening, when being asked to take part in the crime, on the other hand. The poem "The Lady's Lake" reminds us of the story of a Gypsy man's attempt to save a young white woman from being taken by spahis. Unluckily, they cannot escape but find their death in the waters of a lake. The ballad as a poetic genre constitutes Radu Gyr's best choice in dealing with undocumented stories, transmitted mostly orally. What is remarkable in his ballads is that he constructed an arsenal of poetic techniques to chronicle such stories from nameless heroes' point of view, which otherwise might have remained completely unknown.

In 1955, Nichita Stănescu made his debut with *Slangy or Holdup Songs*, a collection of poems that partially defied the realist-cultural politics of the epoch, according to which an apolitical poet was considered to be against the Communist Party. The famous newspaper *Scînteia* (*The Sparkle*) had criticized the haidouk-like and botanic tendencies of poetry in the 1950s. Many of his first poems were published only posthumously. The acceptable ones appeared in the cultural newspapers of the time. In the poem "Holdup Song," the main character, a poetic alter ego, is portrayed as a tomcat "with one green eye and one brown eye," a sign of hybridity, a mask used by Stănescu to write about the racially, ethnically and culturally hybrid society he had been born into. The poem captures the tragic destiny of those who attempt to transgress social and cultural boundaries. The tomcat's desire to be something he could not—a flourishing hybrid breed—is dwarfed by public scorn: seven women throw stones at and curse him; he is humiliated, becomes penniless and walks aimlessly. The poem ends in irony, with the tomcat's death in a local "dump," accompanied by "a drunken fiddler," a character who warns: leaving the patriarchal nomadic Gypsy life is similar to ignoring traditional order. Stănescu selects his characters from the slums of Ploiești and Bucharest. The women of the periphery are either morally sick, betrayers of their lovers, witches, experts in superstitions and spells, or fit to be speechless muses. On the other hand, men are haidouks, too young at heart to be able to cope with social maladjustment, wise fiddlers, yet not enough educated to be considered real artists, or drunkards, outlaws and losers. Time itself is compared with a "doddering old beggar." On the other hand, they are described as very sensitive, as men in love, meditative and self-reflective. Strikingly, the poet identifies himself with all these categories. For example, the poem "In Malastropu's Pub" describes a decaying atmosphere, in which customers "wear their houses/in bottles kept in their pockets," flies "die on the counter" or "in a wine spit on the floor" and the walls are "freckled with flies." Charmed by the music of a cymbal, the poet feels "ferociously weakened/like a razor's edge," a context in which writing verse is as necessary as "peeing," as the poet concludes in "Ars poetica." In another poem—"Anti Ars Poetica"—he associates the small dirty universe of periphery with the immensity of cosmos in a memorable metaphor: "dogs wearing galaxies on their tails." In "Song of Disgust," poetry itself is personified and interpellated: "you, slattern of words." There are several symbols connected with racial difference such as the cricket or the crow and the more abstract colors black, brown and coppery. In "Silent Song," a poem based on the symbol of the caravan, the poet describes "the crickets of the slow

wagons/hidden in shafts that gnaw and gnaw.” The presence of the scarecrow in the poem “Evening at the Outskirts of Ploiești” shows the symbol does not have any power, as it is compared with a sloppy woman, “disgusted by so much chattering.” In Stănescu’s debut volume, one can identify several types of language hybridization: the mixture of the new communist administrative language and bawdy insinuations, the colorful language of periphery and folklore is mingled with the poet’s own budding style, while slandering and cursing go hand in hand with philosophical wisdom. All these produce both humor and sadness, a tragicomic literary outcome.

In the postwar decades, the role of poetry in tackling aspects related to Gypsiness was taken over by prose and other forms of artistic production. However, poets continued to embark on matters connected with race, color, ethnicity and power relations in a more subtle and abstract manner, in the socio-political circumstances of ethnic assimilation. More concerned with style, poets such as Nichita Stănescu, Gabriela Melinescu or Gellu Naum, to name some of the greatest, have transfigured these matters and adopted what is called lateral thinking.

In “The Ninth Elegy,” a poem published first in 1966, Nichita Stănescu identifies himself with an emerging subjectivity within “a black egg,” an expression of the infinite universe, a valorization of the “great darkness” and blackness in general and an identification with the unborn as well as with never-ending birth¹⁹:

From sleep only
can everyone wake up –
from life’s husk, nobody
ever.

Cultural and ethnic assimilation during communism was sometimes complemented by linguistic syncretism and dreamlike subjectivities. In a poem entitled “Zimzum” from 1974, the surrealist poet Gellu Naum combines Hebrew cabbalistic wisdom, references to the Gypsy lifestyle and a complex art of metaphor and surrealist style, to imagine what he calls “the hour of exemplary love,” a possible label for Romanian balkanization as a socio-cultural process. The voice of the poem addresses a potential Eve of the natural world:

look at the convoy its dowry of alveoli
everyone wears three bodies under furs of bear
the syntax of the pyre and the ceremonial remembrance of oblivion [...]
three wings for everyone and their complicated nomad mechanics

The poet advocates the Hebrew meaning of zimzum, according to which the physical universe conceals the spiritual nature of creation. This results in a conceptual space, where the physical universe and free will can co-exist. I would identify such a space with the metaphor of “the silent ball,” understood as a noiseless and painless mixture of different subjectivities: “uneasiness has deserted us for a silent ball/her hay mask pasted on her cheeks.”

In her poems from the 1960s, Gabriela Melinescu combines ethnic details with her own abstract and rhyming style. “Dudești Avenue” and “Eufemia” are two illustrative texts about a distinct ethnically hybrid atmosphere at the outskirts of Bucharest. The first poem depicts the wedding of Ilinca, “white flower of Dudești,” and a groom whose identity is not mentioned, but whose possible Gypsiness is suggested by the presence of the diligent florists, the fiddlers and the “crazy Gypsy horas.” In contrast with the positive atmosphere of the wedding, a symbol of public approval of an interethnic marriage, the poem “Eufemia”

¹⁹ In Romanian culture, black is traditionally associated with death.

captures a disturbing spirit of intimate interethnic incongruence. It is the mysterious story of a double suicide: the proud Eufemia, described as “a sweet snake in a black veil,” poisons herself, while colonel Ozun hangs himself. Both tragedies take place for reasons unmentioned. Fragments of the possibly tragic puzzling story are discovered by children in the attic, which casts an innocent light on a serious private affair, laden with guilt and conflict.

Swarthy afternoon,
Gypsy skin awoke
lying on her soul, waving like oil
in rooms coiling the touch of wood.
Fear has a waxen beak,
someone taloned its jugular,
when the parents sleep downstairs,
laying bare, white teeth unaware.

Two other poems from the 1970s show a higher level of surrealism and a departure from the ethnic approach. In “The Ravens,” from *The Illness of Divine Origin* (1972), Melinescu contrasts a field covered in snow and a flock of ravens, brought by destiny’s hand above the field, “where, even bodiless, somebody was trying to be.” Such proximity does not remain without effect, but it produces difference within what is believed to be whole, intact, untouched and pure:

The field separated from its own self.
A strong animal began to grow
underneath the white cap
the snow has swelled up ready to burst.
At night too something has moved
a muscle of the air, a ghostly smell
when suddenly they came
apparently kept by a hand above us
the ravens were throwing
shadows of people on the field.

Whereas the snow field becomes pregnant, the hovering of the ravens brings spiritual consistency. The distinction between “us” and “them,” however, suits the distinction between groups of different origins and breeds. A strikingly similar poem—“Winter Landscape”—from *Against the Loved One* (1975) transforms the collective problematic of the previous poem into a one-to-one experience:

I was walking by crying
and not wishing to meet anyone.
A black bird saw me, it was graceful,
one of those the gardeners
chase away with stones,
it seemed to me as black a
the unlit milk
confined within the soft flesh of a mother.
There were white knives and nails
scattered on its body.
But it did not bleed at all.
What short ears
and eyes it had, like a fish’s!

I grabbed a piece of wood
to punish it and out of fear too,
when it just rose
like a palace on two rods of brass.
And its wing beat pulled my hair
and blew it away, like a parachute

The poem places the self and the black bird in antithesis, to render the tension between identity and alterity visible. The comparison of the bird's blackness to "the unlit milk/confined within the soft flesh of a mother" transforms the uncanny of alterity into a more familiar construction. The description of the black bird's body cancels any sign of violence history may have registered and evokes its apparent maternal silence or muteness. The black bird's presence simultaneously inspires excitement, fury and fear. Immediately after the fall of the communist regime, Mircea Cărtărescu published *The Levant* (1990), a postmodern epic poem written in the late 1980s, which intertextually draws on a variety of Romanian poets, from Ienăchiță Văcărescu to Nichita Stănescu, to tell the story of an Oriental quest for poetry itself. Echoing *The Gypsyiad*, "The Eighth Song" of it refers to a Gypsy tribe, led by one of the characters, the young Greek Zotalis, the son of pirate Iurta. Iurta unexpectedly meets his son, who was supposed to be studying in Cambridge, but gave up in favor of a nomad life among Gypsies. Zotalis becomes their bulibasha "by artifice," by luring them with an invented dream about "a happy Wallachia," an imaginary land of abundance and prosperity, where "the street drains/gurgle with Pepsi and Coca-Cola" and where, "if they wished, they all could stay forever."

Using stereotypes, Gypsy women are depicted in their plurality—"Radas, Stancas"—as sexually attractive, readily available for men's pleasure, able to dance, sing and foretell the future, while Gypsy men are portrayed as being afraid when facing strangers, as speaking another language that needs translation, ready "to make good spoons and to repair wheels," in order to negotiate their place on earth. Interestingly, the temporary location of the tribe is the place where father and son, non-Gypsies, reveal their purpose in life: the former would do anything (kill, steal and sell his soul) to see his son studying science in "Englitora"; the latter, convinced that "neither perihelion nor equinox/can bring polenta," chooses a Byronic lifestyle, travelling as a nomad in the Balkans. Their dialogue emphasizes the tension between the role of Western and Balkanic values, reinforcing a rather exotic view on Gypsiness. Regrettably, the epic poem leaves the experience of the Romanian Gypsies during communism unspoken and subject to further stereotypes, generated and perpetuated by the dominant, elitist culture.

The post-1989 decades have known a return to expressing the awareness of ethnic difference among both non-Roma and Roma poets. While many try to make sense of it and to use poetry in order to build a subjective third space, the role of ethnic agency proves to have a higher relevance among Roma poets. While non-Roma poets tend to manifest their social attachment to Roma ethos, Roma writers' poems display a rather introspective attitude, rooted not in the immediate reality and experience, but in imagination and a surreal approach to knowledge. Three examples for each group follow.

In a volume of prose poems from 2003, Doina Ioanid evokes the figure of an old Gypsy woman. Meeting Tinkergypsy at her place stands for an attempt to understand her condition. A reflection on colors alludes to the importance of essentialism in operating with ethnic and racial matters, emphasized by the rapport between the speaking first person and the evoked third person: "Once again I walk into the rape field. Green and yellow by turns. Out of yellow and green you get khaki, but this is no place for mixing up things. Tinkergypsy then gives me a nicely crisped pig ear. As we munch on, me with my strong teeth, she with her nearly black stumps, the world comes into balance."²⁰

²⁰ Translated from Romanian by Florin Bican at:
<http://www.poetryinternationalweb.net/pi/site/poem/item/19377>

However, the binary strength/weakness and its association with eating and balance can be read as an indirect reference to aspects of cultural assimilation and further need to explore the effects of it and its possible alternatives.

The first person is also adopted by Elena Vlădăreanu in “product description” from *private space* (2009), a poem in which she explores the profile of a young Roma woman as it appears in the mass media:

I am a Roma ethnic.
I am 25. I have no job. I have no house. I have no studies.
I can read. I can sign my name.
I am clinically healthy.
I declare on my own account I have never practiced prostitution.
I declare on my own account I have never consumed forbidden substances.
I do not steal. I have never stolen anything. [...]
What frightens me most are the hidden camera and the butcheries.

The conceptual undertaking, with its disinterest in linguistic creativity, may fit some battles against stereotypes, because it invites readers to think about the idea of the work, rather than read the poem, but it may also reinforce them. Only the final line shatters them by possibly suggesting the uncanny nature of objectification, implied by the title of the poem, too.

In “Cutting ‘em out,”²¹ a poem by Mihail Gălăţanu, a nameless Gypsy woman’s charm—especially her voice epitomized by her “lip-prints/left on glasses”—becomes the object of the poet’s desire. The invocation of her lips—a source of curses and kisses, protests and healing, a reason to commit suicide, but also of endless longing—may constitute both a challenge addressed to Roma women writers and evidence of a new stage regarding the interethnic literary dialogue. The poem abounds in endearing appellatives disguised in offensive nouns such as “good-for-nothing,” “fatty,” “magrao,” in parallel with more neutral ones such as “bride.” It takes over the flavor of Federico García Lorca’s poems, via Miron Radu Paraschivescu, with a touch of Balkanic ethos and personal confession of an inescapable desire.

The post-1989 years have seen the emergence of a few poets of Roma ethnicity—Luminița Cioabă, Gelu Măgureanu, Mircea Lăcătuș, for example—as one of the effects of recent activism, educational and mass media programmes dedicated to Roma, and of the more general and global multicultural trend, perceived as an asset of democracy.²²

In *Poems of Yesterday and Today* (2007), Luminița Cioabă draws on the Gypsy wisdom according to which—to paraphrase Emily Dickinson’s line—the world is wider than the sky. The style of her poetry is incantatory, nostalgic and imbued with pantheist spirituality and it only sometimes focuses on ethnic essence. The poet imagines “Gypsy Angels”²³ who “offer you their wing/wiping away your tear/with a violin’s string,” in line with the general perception that music is one of the Gypsies’ assets. Their location between the sky and the earth may be an echo of the Trishanku’s heaven, a middle ground between one’s current state and one’s current desires, existing in the Sanskrit epic *Ramayana*. The poet is nostalgic about nomadic life, called “travel”, as she compares Gypsies roaming from people to people with the way cosmos is organized. Her poetry reminds us there is a certain degree of the unexpected in the world and one should always be ready for that. Cioabă’s poetry often attempts to transform misfortune into spiritual

²¹ The whole poem is available at: <http://editura.mttlc.ro/carti/Vianu-Romanian-PEN-Club-Anthology.pdf>.

²² Part of the collections taken into account debunk stereotypes such as the idealized and exoticized portrayals of Roma/Gypsy characters and the general nomadic character of Gypsiness or the myth of placelessness, as if sedentarism and the need to belong do not constitute a reality among Roma.

²³ Translation from Romanian by Adam J. Sorkin and Cristina Cîrstea. The poem is available at: <http://www.transnational-perspectives.org/transnational/articles/article276.pdf>.

balance and to cast a certain level of mystery on interethnic bonds by references to the natural world, not at all considered inferior to civilization, but resourceful and reliable: "If you do not wish to be lost in the world/Choose a friend for yourself/A tree/Since it cannot ever touch you/With a word or sorrow." For her, eternity is equivalent to a return to the nature, as in the poem "When We'll Be Trees." Written in Romanian, some of her poems have been translated into Romani, English and German.

Roma poet Gelu Măgureanu was an active player in the post-communist process of Roma inclusion, but regrettably he died too soon in 2009. His first and last collection, *The Window of Beyond* (2005), has a confessional, introspective tonality and is addressed to a generic brother, with a mixed identity, similar to Baudelaire's "mon frère, mon semblable." Writing from an ethnic perspective, often critical, his collection shows a tension between a surrealist vision and historical truth, between collective and personal memory. Addressing the generic brother, both an alter ego and an other, Măgureanu writes as if in response to Arghezi's *Mildew Flowers*: "if you could scratch the walls of the carbonized hand/my nothingness would become your light." These lines remind us of the Hindu ritual of the funeral pyre, of holocaust, of radical blackness. The poet subtly explains that to choose between being a nomad and belonging to a certain land might not be easy. The struggle to turn collective loss into an artistic asset is most evident:

out of my own memory you made
food for the lid inside the nest
in return you left me the fields shrunken
by a humble wish to go with the caravans

Another fragment describing the tension mentioned above reveals a clear absorption of the idea of alterity, while the symbol of the horse is reassessed as precious inheritance:

with the risk of being rejected by both worlds
I wander along the walls and wells away from home
and I feel the stalks pushing through my chest
as if I were within the ribs of a horse

In his debut volume, sculptor Mircea Lăcătuș (2009) celebrates his ethnic background by drawing on personal memory, family relations and intergenerational bonds. The poem "I Was Building a Borough Around My Parents"—the book bears the same title—is constructed around the symbols of the house and the apricot-tree, meant to build a rather rooted than routed subjectivity, in which nomadism is assimilated as a spiritual and artistic domain:

my parents built a house
used to work all day long forgetting about me
they built it around an old apricot-tree
which my father did not wish to cut down [...]
under the apricot-tree I built ramparts
around my parents wall after wall
only the apricot-tree pretended it did not get it
while very big blue flowers were snowing over me

Conclusions

Allowing for these fragments of the vast body of Romanian poetry, I have attempted with this article to outline several significant moments when poets contributed to the literary corpus centered on Gypsiness. Before 1989, the color line in terms of poetry was a reality: if Gypsy poets existed, they were

rather invisible, outcast, not accepted as such. Only further biographic research and literary historiography might challenge such a view.

A century and a half ago, a notorious line from the Romantic drama *Răzvan și Vidra* (1867) by Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu cast a negative light on the capacity of a Gypsy to be a poet, in spite of the gift of singing, usually associated with Gypsiness. Bailiff Bașotă, the one who arrests Răzvan, because he composed verses against the oppressive regime, is in two minds about his creative skills: "A Gypsy man writes poems, I wouldn't have believed it... /I reckon his face shows us he is quite shrewd and smart." Echoing the rise and fall of a freed Gypsy slave, the play itself ends with Răzvan's death, while he fights against his political enemies. Written in a very nationalist epoch, the ending subtly emphasizes the author's ultimate distrust of significant otherness and, in particular, his now outdated view that a Gypsy lacks the capacity of endurance and possible victory.

However, with more or less sensitivity to difference, Romanian poets have included Gypsy culture in their works and more often than not they have displayed empathic perspectives regarding a marginalized population, but their literary productions have only very slowly transcended the page, to have an impact on society and mentality. The selection above indicates that hybrid literary constructions have been rarely celebrated *per se*, for their very hybridity. Moreover, cases valorizing the essence of the Roma/Gypsy life through poetry are very infrequent and placed out of the national literary canon.

What is crucial nowadays is that poetry has become a lifestyle for a number of authors of Roma /Gypsy origin, who have taken poetry seriously and are eager to play with its transformative power in order to reconfigure cutting-edge, more adequate approaches to the contemporary multicultural identities. Only by encouraging creativity and by promoting self-confidence among younger generations of Roma / Gypsy authors, can "the risk of being rejected by both worlds" and the simplistic, stereotyping identifications be diminished, overcome and eventually replaced by a sense of authenticity, credibility, multiple belonging, mediation and cultural maturity.

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Mother Nature Pays Back Curiosity and Rapacity

Abstract: Curiosity has helped people discover vast areas of this world, wild at the beginning, tamed, populated and helpful afterwards, when fairly dealt with. Literature mirrors plenty of negative, painful examples of the process of "exploring" Africa along the centuries, much of it being skillfully revealed in J. Reader's *Biography of Africa*. The current paper argues that in spite of the fact that some writers have drawn the audience's attention to the unfairness of such intrusions, as Joseph Conrad did with his novella *Heart of Darkness*, the situation has worsened dramatically, affecting its people and its environment. My focus is on Tim Butcher's *Blood River*, a colorful and vibrant account of what life is like nowadays in the same place on the African map where Mother Nature has challenged the humans ever since H.M. Stanley, well known explorer and journalist, made important discoveries in Africa, then started to establish the first trading stations in the Congo. All through the book, Butcher keeps looking for an answer which is still bothering him at the end of the journey, as well as many other people who are worried for the Congo. Rodney is one of the African scholars who attempt a plausible answer.

Keywords: Africa, nature, plunder, atrocities, the Congo

Motto: "The sole purpose of human existence is to kindle a light in the darkness of mere being" (Carl Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*).

Introduction

Writers and researchers agree today upon a general incapacity to explain acts of outrageous brutality taking place in certain African countries, manifested during local, inter-tribal conflicts by indigenous population against their kin. In spite of a generally asserted theory claiming that the only reason for violent behavior in Africa is the innate violent nature of its inhabitants, there are scholars who argue that most of these acts are shockingly similar to the Europeans' behavior perpetrated during the long years of slavery and colonialism. Although research is still in progress, some results have already been published and significant comparisons have been made between the way black people were treated by the white people during those dark periods of African history, and the behavior manifested by Africans towards other Africans nowadays. Numerous publications of explorers, missionaries or simple adventurers give relevant examples of the brutal, even extremely cruel acts perpetrated by the white intruders against the black population since their first encounters registered in the 15th century. This paper will focus on the peculiar relationship which developed in Africa between man and nature in circumstances of unfair treatment and plunder, mainly during the colonial time when Europeans, driven by their curiosity, first explored the continent, then, because of their rapacity invaded it, appropriated it, eventually attempting to change it according to their rules and laws of power. There are many examples when Mother Nature behaved like a distinct strong personality who repeatedly discouraged foreign intrusion, this being the real reason for the late discovery of the African continent. There were many European victims of the African climate, ferocious animals or tropical diseases, as civilization and technology were not strong enough in front of Africa's nature. Here and there the white intruders succeeded in imposing their commercial and political logic meant to be put at the service of the West, but almost every white person paid a price for it. Most Europeans who travelled to black Africa declared to have remained physically or mentally affected by the African experience for the rest of their lives.

Africa Is Poor because It Is Rich

Mother Nature needed such a long time to warm its bosom, to cover its bareness with colorful meadows, cool forests, and crystal-clear waters, to save plenty of treasures in its deep pockets for her unborn children, who had to be properly fed and taken care of to have enough supplies to live on and on forever. Theories backed up by the discovery of fossil footprints older than three to six million years in African archaeological sites argue that this is the continent where the roots of our ancestry lie. I proceeded from John Reader's complex study resulting from his deep wish to help people enrich their views about Africa and change their way of thinking about this part of the globe. He has the "conviction that, throughout recorded history, Africa has been woefully misunderstood and misused by the rest of the world. Humanity simply does not recognize its debts and obligations to Africa. In western imagery, Africa is the 'dark continent'... Africa is believed to be inherently barbaric and less civilized than the rest of the world" (Preface, X).

Reader gives a detailed account of the "physical processes which have determined the course of the developmental progressions and, where relevant, defines the ecological context in which they occurred" (Preface, XI).

He claims that apart from its huge size, the position Africa has on the map is of vital importance for the ecological potential of which the human population could always take advantage. He scientifically explains how "the particularities of ancient geology have endowed the continent with immense deposits of mineral wealth" (Reader 9), which helped many African countries develop, but not entirely to their own advantage. The huge profits went to other societies which came into contact with the black continent and discovered Africa's richness during the last five centuries. It is an illustration of how human curiosity became temptation, then turned into rapacity, the fundamental reason for perpetual exploitation, which leaves no chance for development especially because of barbaric and inappropriate practices which have severely affected indigenous populations, not only in Africa but also in other parts of the world where the sequence of events and the human contacts took place according to similar patterns.

Human development is in close relationship with nature, or as Walter Rodney argues, with "man's control over his environment—which means in effect that every continent can point to a period of economic development. Africa, being the original home of man, was a major participant in the process in which human groups displayed an ever-increasing capacity to extract a living from the natural environment" (4).

What can be noticed about the human societies, which have developed at a different rate from continent to continent, is the fact that periods of development alternated with periods of decline. Rodney comes with the example of Egypt which was at the top of wealthy societies 25 centuries ago, at a time when hunting for survival was the main activity not only in most parts of Africa, but also in other places of the globe such as the British Isles. He reminds us that such a progress could only take place "because of mastery of many scientific natural laws and their invention of technology to irrigate, grow food, and extract minerals from the subsoil" (Rodney 10).

Unfortunately, when "two societies of different sorts come into prolonged and effective contact the rate and character of change taking place in both is seriously affected to the extent that entirely new patterns are created" (Rodney 20) as in the case of capitalism, imperialism, colonialism, where relationships are based on exploitation. Rodney argues that the logical consequence of an increased level of exploitation and export of the surplus is but to deprive the less developed societies of "the benefit of their natural resources and labor" which is "an integral part of underdevelopment in the contemporary sense" (20). I would add that this is also the consequence of the inappropriate approach of a new and unknown land and environment, which is to be noticed in some of the colonialist practices. As Rodney asserts, "when an outsider comes into a new ecological system, even if he is more skilled, he does not necessarily function as effectively as those who have familiarized themselves with the environment over

centuries; and the new comer is likely to look more ridiculous if he is too arrogant to realize that he has something to learn from the 'Natives'" (64).

He gives an example of what happened In some cases of colonialist encounter:

[M]ost African societies raised cultivation of their own particular staple to a fine art... the widespread resort to shifting cultivation with burning and light hoeing was not as childish as the first European colonialists supposed. That simple form of agriculture was based on a correct evaluation of the soil-potential, which was not as great as initially appears from the heavy vegetation; and when the colonialists started up-setting the thin top-soil the result was disastrous. (63).

Even in such cases where the new-comers succeeded in controlling the environment by apparently taming nature and civilizing the natives, the final result was "underdevelopment," or as Butcher wrote in his book about the Congo, "this [country] was not just undeveloped but undeveloping" (165). This is the reason why I focused on the Congo, named Zaire by the native leader Mobutu Sese Seko, or the Democratic Republic of the Congo by its new leaders after long years of international plunder. The present situation is considered by specialists the greatest humanitarian crisis of the 21st century, too complicated to be solved, in spite of its huge potential represented by its large quantities of valuable minerals contained in its ground, "an estimated \$24 trillion worth of untapped deposits" (www.care4congo.org), which turns this country into a very attractive target for continental neighbors, for Europeans, Americans and Asians. It lies in the very heart of Africa being crossed by the second longest river in the world, the Congo River, called the Blood River in the travel book with the same title written by Tim Butcher. It is not only Butcher's *Blood River*, but dozens of books written by European, American and African writers that attempted to draw public attention upon an incredibly tragic situation existing mainly in the Congo, Sierra Leone, Liberia and other places of Africa. My interest here is in the Congo for an aspect that still arouses many questions. It is the country with the richest mineral resources of the continent, the second longest river in the world, the Congo River, as I have just mentioned, the second largest rainforest called a "lung of the earth", which provides oxygen for this poisoned and poisonous environment, but in spite of all these extremely generous natural conditions the living standard is at the limit of survival.

Exploration Brought Colonization

Butcher became so very intrigued by what he discovered while working as a war-correspondent for *The Daily Telegraph* in 2000, during one of the bloodiest African wars, that he decided to revisit the Congo in the following years in order to understand the mechanisms at work "in a country where acute poverty makes lawlessness routine" (XII). A country where the fabric of traditional society has almost been destroyed during too long a period of plunder and injustice, atrocities and genocidal colonial and postcolonial practices, paradoxically still applied nowadays by the local militias and authorities upon their co-nationals, and where nature seems to keep fighting against the intruders in its specific manners.

The first step of Butcher's courageous attempt was a serious three-year-long preparation meaning planning and research, which helped him discover unbelievable historical truths, some of them still covered by a veil meant to protect certain countries and personalities against the public opprobrium. Names which used to symbolize fame and power, even role models for children and youths of the colonial period were the carriers of brutal practices from Europe to Africa, where the natives were living according to their own rules and laws. In his attempt to understand and make his readers find out when the tragedy of this country has started, Butcher gives a detailed account of the historical and geographical events going back in time as far as 1482, when tenacious Portuguese mariners, who had already explored the upper western coast of Africa, came across a stunning escape while sailing towards the impressive delta of the Congo River. It was Diogo Cão, a Portuguese seaman who reported about "an immense river mouth

guarded by two long spits of sand reaching far out from the mainland like the mandibles of a giant insect. He knew immediately that the river was greater than any so far discovered in Africa" (Butcher 31).

At that time the Portuguese and the Arabs had the means to get ashore the western, respectively the eastern African coasts. Apart from the trade practiced for centuries between different countries inland or across seas and oceans, people used their knowledge and power, represented mainly by different kinds of ships and weapons, to kidnap the natives and sell them where good profits could be earned, being often helped by the natives themselves in a process that was to be perfected and known as the slavery system. The practice of taking prisoners was not new for the native tribes who used to apply it during their inter-tribal conflicts as war strategy. The Portuguese tempted the indigenous people with their weapons which could help them win those local wars. It was one of the first acts of introducing violence accomplished by means of European fire weapons during long years of contact between societies with different levels of development.

Butcher admits that he "felt a personal link to the Congo and its turbulent history" when he read that "it had all been started by another reporter sent to Africa by *The Telegraph* more than a century before him" (5). It was Sir Henry Morton Stanley, the world's best-known journalist of the time, who had impressed him when he was still a child, intrigued him when he became a journalist himself, and finished by challenging his curiosity to remake an almost impossible track Stanley had covered on land and on water along the Congo River due to his courage and intuition.

Stanley had been "commissioned jointly by *The Telegraph* and an American newspaper, *The New York Herald*" (Butcher 6) to trace David Livingstone, a well-known missionary and explorer of the 1860s, and that was an opportunity to discover that Africa was a promising land; so promising that Leopold II, king of Belgium, figured it as a chance for him to become a land owner, thus encouraging and supporting Stanley to accomplish a second journey, that time in order to trade the huge surface of the Congo in exchange for colored beads, bracelets, glass ornaments and lengths of fabric. The natives could easily be tricked into what was presented as a fair bargain for both parts interested in the business. Not knowing how to write, black people were taught how to sign by drawing a cross, a flower or simply two lines, as can be read in reports written by Roger Casement, a British official working in different countries of Africa, who had previously taken part in the 1884 expedition organized and led by Stanley, while aiming at getting the right of property upon huge territories representing what was to become the Congo Free State, under Leopold II's single ownership.

It had not been pure and simple curiosity In that "epoch-changing journey" (Butcher 6). It was real temptation for "a man from a wretched background who sought wealth and status through one of the most high-profile, lucrative, but risky career paths of his time, African exploration" (Butcher 42). The proof that he had made the right choice was the huge amount of money, £50,000, paid in advance by the British publishers Sampson Low, Marston & Company for a travel book Stanley wrote after his first trip of 1871. The book met unknown sales records, the author was acclaimed and invited across the Atlantic to give lectures on his journey, and Queen Victoria herself presented him with special honors.

When he came back from his second voyage and published more about his latest adventures, revealing details about the brutal treatment he had used upon the natives, "he stirred angry controversy among humanitarian activists of the day. But their complaints were deafened by the hero's welcome Stanley received when he returned to London in 1878" (Butcher 6).

His second book, *Through the Dark Continent*, was one of the first documents attesting the inhuman behavior perpetrated by some 'civilized' people against other human beings within their homeland, which was not a colony at that moment, but which became one in exchange of beads and fabric. It became the largest colony ever, belonging to the obscure European ruler, Leopold II, who had found the way to become famous. It was the perfect source of human trade, ivory, rubber, and other goods. The worst consequences were that "Leopold jostling for the Congo forced other European powers to stake claims to Africa's interior,

and within two decades the entire continent had effectively been carved up by the white man. The modern history of Africa—decades of colonial exploitation and post-independence chaos—was begun by a *Telegraph* reporter battling down the Congo River” (Butcher 7).

An Attempt at Subduing Nature

It was the beginning of disaster for Mother Nature as well as for the humans there. Both were treated with tremendous cruelty: nature had to be tamed and plundered as well as the natives—countless rubber-tree branches were cut down while human hands were severed in guise of punishment for laziness or as a proof that the cartridges were not wasted in vain but for killing disobedient workers. The rubber crop was expected to be huge for the European developing car industry. In spite of this outrageous treatment of the natives, Stanley was trying to be convincing when speaking about promising projects and human ways of accomplishment:

We travelled through the Congo making roads and stations, negotiating for privileges, surveying the vast area, teaching and preparing the natives for the near advent of a bright and happy future for them, winning them by gentleness, appeasing their passions, inculcating commercial principles, showing them the nature of the produce that would be marketable when the white man should come; and everywhere, we were accepted as their friends and benefactors. (Helen Carr qtd in Hulme and McDougall 173-174)

For several years he succeeded in misleading not only a remote public with reduced possibilities of checking upon the information sources, but also young men like Roger Casement and “many of his contemporaries [of] the 1880s [who] must have seen the colonies as the obvious answer for impoverished but personable and ambitious” men (Carr 173) and let themselves tempted by such challenging deeds as travelling to Africa for various purposes:

Casement joined the Congo International Association, working for Leopold II of Belgium, along with H. M. Stanley: two of those he would most condemn twenty years later. At the time, however, he appears to have embraced their published civilizing mission as genuine. The Association’s official aims were ‘to work for the improvement of the Congo natives’ moral and material conditions, and to suppress slavery’. H. M. Stanley’s reputation was at that period very great, a fearless adventurer bringing light to a dark continent, and he did a fine line in rhetorical moralizing, which in those early days Casement appears to have believed. (Carr 173)

Stanley wrote books as I have shown, but also diaries, letters, articles for the journals sponsoring him, all of them explicit documents for the postcolonial theories arguing that people’s perception of the world is shaped by the language of power, the dominant language that historians, novelists, newspaper correspondents use to describe reality to the masses. Especially in the Victorian times, people’s access to first-hand information about distant places in the world was limited at best, if not completely absent. They could only rely on other people’s accounts of their experience in such places, not on objective facts.

Language constructs reality. This is valid especially for colonialist writers who shaped reality through words. For centuries Africa was seen only through the eyes of writers that chose to depict it. Their knowledge of that part of the world was not only subjective, but also biased, as contemporary studies have shown. Colonization was not a cultural process. It was a process of imposing one’s power language on an unsuspecting and innocent world and turning it into one individual’s version of what it should have been. Michel Foucault was the one who focused on knowledge and language as power, as well as on the fragmentary and subjective nature of this knowledge. Walter Rodney had his own approach to power asserting that “in relations between people, the question of power determines maneuverability in bargaining, the extent to which a people survive as a physical and cultural entity. When one society finds

itself forced to relinquish power entirely to another society that in itself is a form of underdevelopment” (352).

In 1884, the most influent European powers met in Berlin for a conference which had as urgent priority the Scramble for Africa. It was the moment when an entire continent was arbitrarily divided on the map according to the different nations’ wishes, borders having been drawn in some cases by separating families, in other cases including in one single nation tribes speaking different languages and having never had any contact before. In the years that followed, many of the Congo’s leaders favored certain ethnic groups and areas over others, exacerbating differences between them.

In 1885, the U.S. and Europe gave Leopold II the legal recognition of a three-million square kilometers area, the Congo Free State, as a single owner. Leopold tried to get full popular understanding and support by making repeated public declarations of his sincere intentions to Christianize and modernize the Congolese population, while in truth he was thoroughly planning the lucrative ivory and rubber business. During 1885-1908, huge quantities of ivory and rubber were shipped to Europe and the U.S. and large areas of Congo land were given into concession to different foreign companies. As a result, millions of Congolese died because of brutal treatment, hunger or disease, and other millions were mutilated for life because of the savage habit of cutting off hands or other body parts as punishment for poor work or different ridiculous accusations. Accounts of these atrocities are to be found either in diaries and letters of agents and officers such as George Bricusse, Léon Fievéz or Louis Leclerc, whose duty was to apply cruel methods in order to get full obedience, but mainly more and more rubber, or in articles, reports and other documents, published by scandalized missionaries. Swedish Reverend Sjoblom is said to have been the first to reveal to Europe the practice of cutting off hands; Father Honoré Vinck, John Murphy, Charles Banks, Joseph Clarkin, in whose mission Casement lived for a while during his stay in the Congo, explorers or officials like Casement whom I have already mentioned or William Pickergill, a British diplomat too, wrote about Leopold’s moral responsibility for what was happening in the system he had backed and organized (cf. “White king, Red Rubber, Black Death,” web. 2004).

Colonial Patterns of Violent Behavior

That system was the root of the evil perpetuated over the years and manifested by the indigenous population against their kin nowadays. The natives were whipped, shot, mutilated. Besides, Leopold’s men applied the hostage system, of whose existence the King and the state were perfectly aware, as Casement explained in one of his official reports (cf. Llosa 99-103). Women from entire villages were taken and held hostage in order to force men to go and work for the companies. Consequently, there was nobody to work in the fields, to hunt, to fish, which caused starvation together with humiliation because men could not help their wives into freedom. When the colonizers took even more advantage of the situation and raped the defenseless women, sometimes in front of their husbands and children, those families’ dignity was crushed; the whole community suffered. The nucleus of a normal family was destroyed (cf. “Crisis in the Congo: Uncovering the Truth,” web. 2012).

The U.S. and the European press revealed part of these horrors taking place in Leopold’s Congo because people such as Edmund D. Morel wrote articles to draw the public attention upon the gravity of the situation. As a specialist in Western African Affairs, Morel had the opportunity to see what kind of trade was going on in the port he was supervising: only whips, weapons and ammunition were going back to Africa to pay for the rich loads of ivory, rubber and other goods. He declared that he had “stumbled upon a secret society of murderers” (Hochschild 134) and he wrote many articles after having understood that only forced labor could be the basis of such huge quantities of rubber sent to Belgium. Morel persuaded missionaries to confess. The British government sent Roger Casement to check upon the situation and he wrote a detailed report confirming Morel’s suppositions. Both cooperated in revealing parts of the truths because “some of the stories were unprintable” (web. 2004). In 1904, they founded the

first humanitarian association: "Congo Reform Association." At the same time, Belgian intellectuals and politicians came out openly against the King, while international criticism was mounting in different ways, writers being the most effective in disseminating the truth. Joseph Conrad published *Heart of Darkness* in 1902, after having lived his own experience in the Congo; Mark Twain called Leopold II "slayer of 15,000,000 Congolese," denouncing the U.S. policy which sustained Belgium and Leopold, and issued *King Leopold's Soliloquy*, a political satire, in 1905; Conan Doyle published *The Crime of the Congo* in 1908; Anatole France also voiced his rage against the atrocities kept secret for too many years (cf. Butcher 308; Llosa 69; web. 2004).

Congo, the Heart of Darkness

Butcher speaks about his very early interest in African history, in the Congo and "the mighty Congo river" (4-5), which had served as a backdrop for Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness*. He recalls the moments of mature analysis he used to have with his teenaged colleagues upon very serious issues related to the disastrous situation of the Black continent. He explains that they were trying to understand how reliable Chinua Achebe was when he called Conrad a racist, or who was to blame for the problems the Africans had, admitting that they had presumed Africa was "in some way inherently evil" (Butcher 5). It becomes obvious that similar polemics were to be heard in the academic environment as well, while the same point of view about a whole continent and its inhabitants, issued by white people on other continents, represented a good motivation for several writers to approach Africa, in an attempt to change that old and persistent picture created by the European imaginary in centuries. I have already mentioned what Reader stated in the preface of his book related to the most important reason he had when he started writing the complete biography of Africa, precisely aiming at changing the public opinion. Both Butcher and Reader mention the impact Conrad's novella had at the moment of its publication upon the Victorian readers, continuing to influence people of all times. Butcher claims that Francis Ford Coppola couldn't have created his masterpiece *Apocalypse Now*, without having taken *Heart of Darkness* as the main source of inspiration for the insight in the depths of the human soul (5).

It is hard to guess why Conrad, who had experienced colonialism during his childhood in Russian Poland and found out more about slave trading in the Malay Archipelago, chose to work in the colonialist conditions established by Leopold through Stanley's "hard efforts" to set trading stations, but in one of his letters Conrad literally accepts that "before the Congo [he] was just a mere animal" (Jean-Aubry 141).

Much has been said and written about this piece of writing and critics do not seem to have reached common grounds. It has been argued that Conrad's personal experience was partially revealed by Marlow, the main narrator of the novella, and Conrad is to blame for the offending words used all through the book when referring to the indigenous people. He is also to blame, in some critics' opinion, for not having clearly declared that he was against the horrible process of ivory trade he was working for. But we could claim that he was a very subtle writer, a great artist who wrote his novella at the end of the 19th century (1898-1899) with the precise goal of unveiling unknown aspects of the Leopoldian system at work in the Congo, for the large audience who had to be better informed. The public generally knew about Africa and colonialism and did not properly react after having read about the atrocities revealed by Stanley's books. *Heart of Darkness*, written serially in 1899 and first published as a book in 1902, represented a clear message used by the campaigners of the time who were calling for reform in the Congo Free State. There are assumptions that "the first denunciation of the brutality of the ivory-grabbing pilgrims was not written until Conrad was already there, and it was not published until shortly after Conrad had returned to Europe" (Gene M. Moore, Introduction to *Heart of Darkness* VIII). It is well known that Conrad met Casement while he was in the Congo and he also corresponded with Morel. In Reader's opinion Conrad "made little direct contribution to the reform campaign, but humanity's eternal condemnation of Leopold and his imperial

ambitions is encapsulated in the damning words which Kurtz, dishonored custodian of the story's Inner Station, utters as he dies: 'The horror, the horror'" (542).

The journey reported with significant details meant to draw the real picture of the Black continent, a frightening picture because nature proves to be strange, unfriendly towards foreigners, no matter where they are. Conrad illustrates this idea by transferring the feeling of uneasiness and fear felt by any new comer on the African territory to whatever the Roman conquerors may have felt when first treading the ancient English land. So, Marlow goes on with his story:

I was thinking of very old times, when Romans first came here, nineteen hundred years ago [...] Imagine [them] here—the very end of the world, a sea the color of lead, a sky the color of smoke, a kind of ship about as rigid as a concertina—and going up this river with stores, or orders, or what you like. Sandbanks, marshes, forests, savages—precious little to eat fit for a civilized man, nothing but Thames water to drink. No Falernian wine here, no going ashore. Here and there a military camp lost in wilderness, like a needle in a bundle of hay—cold, fog, tempests, disease, exile, and death,—death skulking in the air, in the water, in the bush. They must have died like flies here. (5-6)

This fragment could also be read as Conrad's fair judgement upon its historical significance. As a matter of fact, he is comparing Africa at the moment he set foot on its land and felt like a "wanderer[s] on a prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet" (Conrad 35) to England hundreds of years before. It is about the natural historical flow of events and sequence of human societies found at different stages of development. England seemed the very end of the world for the Romans, the same he felt when he reached the African shore. The colors he uses to describe the British landscape are similar to what his eyes distinguished when the ship he was sailing by approached the Dark Continent, which did not seem friendly at all:

I watched the coast. Watching a coast as it slips by the ship is like thinking about an enigma. There it is before you—smiling, frowning, inviting, grand, mean, insipid, or savage, and almost mute with an air of whispering, Come and find out. This one was almost featureless, as if still in the making, with an aspect of monotonous grimness. The edge of a colossal jungle, so dark-green as to be almost black, fringed with white surf, ran straight, like a ruled line, far away along a blue sea whose glitter was blurred by a creeping mist. Here and there greyish-whitish specks showed up clustered inside white surf... (Conrad 12-13)

Furthermore, he uses the same word "savages" for the inhabitants of ancient Britain because he chooses it to denominate the human being found in a certain stage of its evolution with no connection to the racist connotation he was accused of by Chinua Achebe. There is sympathetic understanding behind Conrad's words transposed in Marlow's story. He could imagine the fear the civilized Romans felt while sailing on a sea the color of lead under a sky the color of smoke, being hampered in their way by sandbanks, marshes, savages and forests, living on military camps lost in the wilderness. Everything seemed threatening to the foreigners who had traveled hundreds of miles in search of new and promising land. The white administrators and trading agents may have felt the same during their first encounters with the Dark Continent, and Conrad himself, while working for the Company on a steamer going up the Congo River, which affected him for the rest of his life, as he confessed to some friends or disciples and also wrote in his diary. We find it expressed by a multitude of adjectival constructions suggesting mystery, deep fear and continuous hardship during this unavoidable contact with the nature of an unknown land:

Trees, trees, millions of trees, massive, immense, running up high; and at their foot, hugging the bank against the stream, crept the little begrimed steam-boat, like a sluggish beetle crawling on the floor of a lofty portico. It made you feel very small, very lost... The reaches opened before us and closed behind, as if

the forest had stepped leisurely across the water to bar the way for our return. We penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness. (Conrad 35)

Nature: Enemy, Friend, or Caring Mother

The forest is perceived as a scary character fighting to defend the land and its inhabitants against the intruding pilgrims. The same forest scaring the foreigners serves as perfect camouflage for the natives:

[A]s we struggled round a bend, there would be a glimpse of rush walls, of peaked grass-roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling, under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage. The steamer toiled along slowly on the edge of a black and incomprehensible frenzy. The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us—who could tell? (Conrad 35)

There are also instances when the forest turns into a warm, embracing mother for the suffering and the dying natives: “black shapes crouched, lay, sat between the trees, leaning against the trunks, clinging to the earth, half coming out, half effaced within the dim light, in all attitudes of pain, abandonment, and despair” (Conrad 16).

Several critics argued that Conrad’s experience of being the captain of a trading steamer on the Congo River was majestically transposed in a metaphoric expression of Carl Jung’s theory developed some years later, on the basis of extended experience, as the journey of individuation. Marlow’s journey upriver helped him confront the reality inside his own soul to the reality he had found in the heart of darkness, which could easily count for the main source of inspiration for the insight in the depths of any human soul:

...travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings. An empty stream, a great silence, an impenetrable forest. The air was warm, thick, heavy, sluggish. There was no joy in the brilliance of sunshine. The long stretches of the waterway ran on, deserted, into the gloom of overshadowed distances... And this stillness of life did not in the least resemble a peace. It was the stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention. (Conrad 33)

It was not only the forest, but also the river which embodied a strong and fearful character able to defeat the intruders. It is so hard to believe he describes the same river Stanley depicts after having seen it for the first time:

A secret rapture filled my soul as I gazed upon the majestic stream. The great mystery that for all these centuries Nature had kept hidden away from the world of science was waiting to be solved. For two hundred and twenty miles I had followed one of the sources to the confluence and now before me lay the superb river itself! My task was to follow it to the Ocean. (Butcher 179-180)

Later, in 1874, he was reporting to Leopold that he had discovered “a massive network of navigable waterways waiting to pump modern commerce and economic development across a swathe of equatorial Africa larger than the entire subcontinent of India” (Butcher 295).

At the same time, Conrad’s river seems totally different from the one described by Butcher’s mother when she recalls a trip she had had to Africa in the late 1950s:

[she travelled by] steamboat through virgin rainforest... spot[ting] the breaks in the bush where fishing villages of thatched huts stood on the river bank... She remembered how the boat dropped her off, apparently in the middle of nowhere, only for her to scramble up the muddy river bank and find, half-hidden by towering elephant grass, a steam-train waiting to take its passengers on to the next leg of their journey, with a steward, clad in a peaked cap of rail-company livery, anxious to keep to the timetable (Butcher 10).

This is a piece of normal life, of almost perfect harmony between man and nature, where nature lets itself tamed and the natives act according to general rules which help human society function upon modern standards. That was why Butcher's mother as well as many other visitors of The Belgian Congo "knew nothing of the brutality that the Belgians used to maintain their rule, or of the turbulent currents then drawing the Congo towards independence." Their memories stayed "rose-tinted" (Butcher 11) about what seemed to be in perfect connection with the "wonderfully mundane" (Butcher 10) life advertised in guidebooks like the one Butcher discovered in a second-hand bookshop in Johannesburg. The 1951 *Travel Guide to the Belgian Congo* was a complete 800-page book full of useful information for tourists. The great interest and amazement for Butcher and his readers or any other person visiting this country today was that it contained maps showing "in precise detail, the country's road network, spreading right across the rainforest and climbing over mountain ranges, and the book lists itineraries with helpful hints about turning left at Kilometer 348 or buying pottery from the natives, *les indigenes*" (Butcher 10).

All that was made possible because:

Just two years after he crossed the Congo as an explorer, Stanley returned as a colonizer. This time he came by ship to the mouth of the river, before heading inland with a party of road-builders, determined to construct an access route through the Crystal Mountains that guard the impassable lower reaches of the river. It took two years and cost the lives of hundreds of African laborers, who were literally worked to death, but slowly some of the most inhospitable terrain in Africa was tamed. It was this display of indefatigability, as much as any of his other actions during his African expeditions, that earned Stanley the Swahili soubriquet *Bula Matari*, or the Breaker of Rocks (81). [...] During the colonial era, the Belgian administration set up an army of *cantonniers* or workmen, who were responsible for every kilometer of the colony's road network. Paid a small monthly retainer, thousands of *cantonniers* across the country would keep the roads free from the advancing jungle, the culverts clear of debris and the bridges in sound working order. By 1949 the colonial authorities boasted 111,971 kilometers of road across the Congo. By 2004 I doubt if there were more than 1,000 kilometers left in the entire country. (Butcher 138-139)

Back to Old Habits

Butcher, who "had stared for years at maps dominated by The Congo River, a silver-bladed sickle, its handle anchored on the coast, its tip buried deep in the equatorial forest" (Butcher XIII), "struggled to recognize Stanley's lyrical description" (Butcher 179) when he found himself face to face with "the mighty river" (Butcher 6) as he used to call it during his youth: "[I]ts looming sense of vastness scared [him]" (Butcher XIII). The huge body of water, "potentially one of the most valuable natural assets in all Africa" (Butcher 295), looked in 2004 almost the same with what Joseph Conrad had described about one hundred years before as "the blankest of blank spaces on the earth's figured surface" (Butcher 296), because "in recent years it has been choked to a standstill by war and mismanagement" (Butcher 295) and the national institutions supposed to open up the river network were "allowed to collapse" (Butcher 295). Butcher gives reasons for having chosen to call it Blood River:

[It] has run with blood from the moment Stanley paddled past here aboard the *Lady Alice* at the head of a flotilla of stolen pirogues. At every stage of the Congo's history, the river had sluiced away its dead-natives shot in their war canoes by Stanley's people in the 1870s; agents of Leopold drowned during clashes with Arab slavers in the 1890s; Belgian officers killed by disease as they toiled to build a modern colony high up an African river in the 1930s; Congolese rebels mown down by white mercenaries in the 1960s; civilians slaughtered in 2000 by African armies sent to the Congo by its greedy neighbors. (215)

In spite of having been a tomb for both natives and intruders, the 'mighty river' was at times a dependable source of life, offering transport and profit, functioning at normal standards:

The modern world had used this river for its toehold in central Africa. Towns had been built along its banks. Motorboats had been assembled here. But while the towns were now abandoned and the boats left to rust, the one constant was the pirogue. It gave the river its pulse, moving people and goods across a swathe of central Africa that was all but abandoned by the outside world. (Butcher 216).

During his 1,734 kilometer-journey along the Congo River with no markers to show the safe channel, Butcher noticed that instead of a clear shining surface the river was covered by a “deadly mat spreading across much of the Congo River basin, suffocating the entire eco-systems” (307). “The water hyacinth floating in clumps that could be as small as a single tendril or as large as a tennis-court-sized raft” (Butcher 306) had been brought by the Belgians imported from South America as a garden ornament many years before. We are told that “the story of the water hyacinth in the Congo is a wonderful allegory for the white man in this country” (Butcher 306) because “it grew and grew and grew... [being] now categorized as a dangerous alien weed that should be eradicated before it clogs even the main arteries of the river system” (Butcher 307). That ornamental plant brought from remote lands found the perfect environment to grow and spread. It happened because the climate is appropriate for certain kinds of vegetation to augment up to huge dimensions, to enlarge covering extremely wide areas.

It is what happened with the jungle which “ate” most of the roads and railways, thus drastically diminishing land transportation. Maps issued in the 1960s indicating roads, railroads and navigable rivers are no good for the present visitors of the Congo. Time seems to have stopped somewhere in the past. Butcher describes “one of the defining moments of [his] journey... through a country with more past than future, [like] a place where the hands of the clock spin not forwards but backwards” (249). The journalist explains his feelings when confronted with an astonishing truth: nature seems to have won its territory back as soon as the intruders left, in spite of the well-implemented roads and railways. The white men’s technology was defeated by the jungle:

I had one of my most profound Congolese experiences...The scene I saw in the twenty-first century was no different from that seen by Stanley in the nineteenth century or by pygmy hunter-gatherers over earlier centuries. It was equatorial Africa at its most authentic, seemingly untouched by the outside world...The ground was brown with mud and rotting vegetation. No direct sunlight reached this far down and there was a musty smell of damp and decomposition. Above me towered canyons of green, as layer after layer of plant life filled the void between forest floor and treetop. I felt suffocated, but not so much from the heat as from the choking, smothering forest... I felt my right boot clunk into something unnaturally hard and angular... It was a cast-iron railway sleeper, perfectly preserved and still connected to a piece of track. (Butcher 248)

The writer specifies that it was not a piece of any railway track, but a very special one which had been “built by the Belgians to circumvent the Stanley Falls, cutting straight through the Equator” (Butcher 249).

Butcher’s book depicts some more situations where Mother Nature behaves like a relentless character permanently fighting against progress and development as if it was trying to struggle with the intruders. There are instances when it may be merciless towards the natives as well, but they try to adjust to its adversities rather than change its natural course. The inhabitants of a village, living on the bank of the Congo River which is flooded every year, speak about their life pointing out that they chose that place to live because it offers a better soil for crops, in spite of their efforts to rebuild their houses and start from scratch every time: “The waters sometimes carry everything away, so we must start again using what we find in the forest. Those modern houses built during the colonial period do not last. They are not suitable for our conditions” (Butcher 219).

This is an example of a close relationship with nature rather than control over nature. Butcher comments that “it was a classic development trap—to survive, these villagers lived somewhere that any attempt to build bigger, better homes was wasted because of the flood threat” (220). It may be an answer

to Butcher's question which has been asked by many postcolonial theorists and by ordinary people as well: "Why are Africans so bad at running Africa?" (310)

Rodney, a prominent African historian, also comes with an explanation which may help the reader better understand the specific conditions existing in Africa. He argues that human beings are the ones who create each and every element in the superstructure of their society and "the political and religious patterns affected each other and were often intertwined. The religious belief that a certain forest was sacred was the kind of element in the superstructure that affected economic activity, since that forest would not be cleared for cultivation" (Rodney 11).

This is a clear example that "peculiarities in the superstructure of any given society have a marked impact on the rate of development" (Rodney 11). He states that the people of his country and of the whole African continent could find the real track towards development and freedom only by achieving the replacement and reshaping of the neo-colonialist government. Rodney displays a very pertinent theory about the effect of colonial power upon Africa as the main reason for Africa's underdevelopment together with the unrealistic approach of the African realities and the imposition of inappropriate solutions where the given conditions had never been correctly and efficiently taken into account: "When one society finds itself forced to relinquish power entirely to another society, that in itself is a form of underdevelopment" (Rodney 132).

Conclusions

The examples I have used in this paper were meant to support the theory that the present social, economic and political situation of Africa and of Congo in particular, the permanent state of conflict and instability have deep roots in history. One of the main reasons why Europeans were tempted to invade the newly discovered lands on another continent was the tremendous richness of Africa's nature. European visionaries who had the reputation of builders, civilizers and even peacemakers, acted violently against Africa's people and its environment, as a matter of fact accomplishing the destruction of ancient natural rules, very old but well-functioning communities, human identities. In 1894, Gustave Le Bon, a French social psychologist, sociologist, anthropologist, inventor and physicist, argued that European civilization and education could not have a positive influence on non-European peoples; on the contrary, it would rather bring them corruption because it would destroy the old cultural background without replacing it with something valuable in accordance with their capacity of reception. It would only manage to disrupt their basic moral laws and their intelligence pushing them backwards even from the level they had already acquired on their own (Todorov 224). Besides, the Western behavior deteriorated, became more and more violent when the economic interest increased as a consequence of new discoveries of more valuable minerals. Entire villages were literally erased from their old premises where new mines had to be opened and exploited. Nowadays, nature keeps fighting against new competitors who act violently and foment native violence which serves their interest in gaining more and more profit from Africa's natural resources (cf. Shorter 347).

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“Some Are Born to Endless Night”: Echo and Epitaph in Jim Jarmusch’s *Dead Man*

Abstract: This essay examines Jim Jarmusch’s film *Dead Man*, a Western that takes the poetry of William Blake both as content and as form. I argue that the film uses two poetic strategies that it associates with Blake—echo and epitaph—to interrogate and destabilize contemporary understandings of identity. I conclude that the film dramatizes how the poetic voice, and by extension, the poetic identity, is always spoken through by some other voice, a conclusion that is mirrored in the formal structure of the film itself. These conclusions also underscore how newer forms of media continue to rework and revise concepts of identity in an increasingly fragmented, hybridized, and performative culture.

Keywords: film, poetry, death, Jarmusch, Blake

Motto: “A dangerous difference, of course. For we have omitted the master-name of the supplementary series: death. Or rather, for death is nothing, the relationship to death, the anguished anticipation of death” (Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*)

Introduction/ Epitaph

“Voice” is one of the most important concepts in literature and art. Good writing *speaks* to us; a talented author has a unique *voice*. Specifically, the voice occupies a central position in a variety of academic debates, both past and contemporary: deconstruction, psychoanalysis, feminism, poetics, postmodernism, trauma studies, and cultural studies, just to name a few. It also occupies a central position in the politics behind these debates: Who gets to speak? For whom? What does it mean to have a voice? From where does the voice speak? Considering the contemporary debate about the relevance of the university and the humanities, the question can also be reframed, becoming not so much “Who gets to speak?” but more importantly, “To whom *can* the humanities speak?” With these questions and debates in mind, it continues to be essential to interrogate the voice in any discussion of identity, and not just the voice in the texts we read or view, but the voice(s) that we, as critics, contribute to the conversations about those texts.

But, in addition to considering the moments when the voice reaches its intended target, it is equally important to consider moments when it fails or goes astray. For example, when considering lyric poetry, it is impossible to ignore John Stuart Mill’s proclamation that a lyric is an utterance “overheard” (12). That is, the lyric voice is able to speak only by reaching an accidental listener. This issue is further complicated in film; the presence of the camera makes it possible to overhear any conversation, and additionally, to (over)see events that would otherwise be impossible to perceive. Both media—poetry and film—are united in Jim Jarmusch’s 1995 film *Dead Man*,²⁴ a western starring Johnny Depp as an accountant named William Blake. After arriving in the town of Machine, which is controlled by the business tycoon Mr. Dickinson, Blake kills a man in self-defense and is also seriously wounded in the gunfight. Wanted as a

²⁴ All quotations from the film are from the following source. *Dead Man*. Dir. Jim Jarmusch. Perf. Johnny Depp, Gary Farmer, and Crispin Glover. Miramax, 1995. DVD.

murderer, he goes on the run, pursued by three bounty hunters: Cole, Conway, and Johnny. William soon meets a Native American named Nobody, who mistakes him for the Romantic poet William Blake. Nobody is both a literal guide across the wilderness, but also a spiritual guide in the journey towards death and the “other world” of the afterlife. Both trajectories are continually inflected by the poetry of William Blake, and as the film progresses, the accountant begins to increasingly speak and act as the poet.²⁵ As the film comes increasingly to focus on William Blake’s hybrid identity, it combines formal and aesthetic questions of poetry with questions about death and subjectivity. By showing how individuals in the present are spoken through and influenced by the echo of the past, the film questions the possibility of a unique, self-enclosed identity as such. In situating such questions in the context of the western film genre, it likewise points to how the historical past continues to inflect the present, both of the individual and of the country or world at large. Thus, the central question in the film is not “Who is William Blake?” but instead “Which William Blake is speaking now?”²⁶

In what follows, I argue that the formal concerns of the film with voice and poetry ultimately function to interrogate and destabilize any understanding of the self as self-enclosed or autonomous. The primary means for this deconstruction is through the two poetic strategies that the film associates with Blake: echo and epitaph. In the shift to the “Which one?” question, the film undermines strict divisions between past and present, self and other, speaking and writing, and life and death, not so much to better define poetry, but rather to consider various and often contradictory definitions of the self as fragmented, hybridized, and performative. I conclude that this interplay dramatizes how the poetic voice, and by extension, the poetic identity, is always spoken through by some other voice, a conclusion that is mirrored in the formal structure of the film itself. This argument about how and from where the voice speaks has implications for poetry, but it also underscores how newer forms of media continue to rework and revise concepts of identity in an increasingly fragmented, hybridized, and performative culture.

Death, Temporality, Writing

From its opening moments, *Dead Man* links writing with death. The film begins with an epigraph from Henri Michaux: “It is preferable not to have to travel with a dead man.” We can start our analysis by noting the linguistic similarity of epigraph to epitaph. If the latter is written over a dead man (‘epi’—meaning over and ‘-taph’ meaning tomb), then the former is written over a text, a sort of epitaph to the death of the author. This comparison widens the potential of what an epitaph can be: not only a written inscription on a tombstone, but also something written in remembrance of the dead person. Furthermore, this sort of remembrance is not limited to the strictly written text; within the film, the binary of speaking and writing is continually complicated and frustrated. In fact, the very idea of a film script suggests a sort of “written speech.” The characters can only speak through the writing of the script, but simultaneously, that writing, as well as the writings of Blake’s poetry, can only “happen” through the speech of the characters. Furthermore, the cinematic performance also contains the potential for improvisation and spontaneous revision, so that the written text is ignored, changed, or modified when it is transformed into speech. Just as the boundaries between speech and writing are continually transformed and interpenetrated, so too is the boundary between death and life. Indeed, the film is unwilling to recognize a strict division between life and death, so that the differences between alive, dying, and dead are slowly eroded.

²⁵ In an attempt at clarity, I will refer to the accountant character as “William” and the poet as “Blake,” though as the above description makes it clear, the film is not interested in any sort of neat separation. With that in mind, I will occasionally also use “William Blake” to refer to the ambiguous combination of the two identities.

²⁶ Giles Deleuze suggests that the shift from the question “What is...?” to “Which one?” is central to Nietzsche’s philosophy, and as such, it is a more effective means for doing philosophy and critical inquiry. See *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia UP, 2006), 75-78.

As its linkage with death suggests, writing also contains the opposite potential: to be transformed not into speech, but into silence. Indeed, there is no spoken dialogue until nearly the sixth minute of the film. Instead, the opening scenes are all about the gaze. William looks at the passengers, and they look back at him. He also looks out the window several times, and the film switches to a first-person perspective, depicting the passing scenery framed by the train window. Eventually, the train fireman sits down next to William and invites him to reflect on that framing, speaking the first lines of the film:

Look out the window. And doesn't this remind you of when you were in the boat, and then later that night, you were lying, looking up at the ceiling, and the water in your head was not dissimilar from the landscape, and you think to yourself, "Why is it that the landscape is moving, but the boat is still?" And also... where is it that you're from?

Formally, the film calls attention to its own meta-cinematic quality: how the film, like the windows of the train, frames what is possible to be seen, and in doing so, structures and controls perception. That formal framing is juxtaposed with questions of temporality (the scene immediately before portrays William looking at his watch), death, and identity. Since the film concludes with an image of a dying William Blake floating away in a canoe, the fireman's lines are prophetic, foretelling the end of the film and William's life. But the language of his prophecy—"doesn't this remind you"—suggests that this future has already happened: that William Blake is already dead. Additionally, this prophecy is connected with the fireman's awkward attempt to start a conversation with William by asking him where he is from. But when William says where he is actually from—"Cleveland"—the fireman does not seem to know where that is. In that sense, William is from nowhere, for a dead man no longer has a home; in fact, William explains that his ties to his past home, his parents and fiancé, are either dead or gone. Thus, this prophecy also functions as an epitaph: a reflection on the past life of the dead man, although much of this "past" has not yet happened, despite the fireman's use of past tense. The temporality of the film is a form of Nietzsche's eternal recurrence, which allows for multiple identities and multiple time periods to co-exist and inflect one another. If an epitaph traditionally answers the "What is?" or "Who is?" question (Who was the dead person? "A Beloved Father and Husband"), the Nietzschean temporality of the film forces the viewer to ask "Which one?" i.e. Which William Blake is the titular "Dead Man?" And, of course, the answer is "Both." In this way, much as the film deconstructs temporal boundaries between past, present, and future, it likewise deconstructs the boundaries between different identities.

In addition to deconstructing identity and temporality, death itself is likewise deconstructed. Within the film, the boundary between dead and alive is unstable, so that the living might be considered already dead and the dead continues to exist among the living. "Nobody" (the character) articulates this living death when he first meets William. "Nobody" asks: "Did you kill the white man who killed you?" to which William can only respond in confusion: "I'm not dead." But when "Nobody" asks him his name and he answers "William Blake," "Nobody" responds with fright: "Then you are a dead man." "Nobody" believes that William is the poet William Blake, and, in that sense, he is literally already dead. But later, "Nobody" admits that it is very strange that William does not remember any of his own poetry. This joke reveals a deeper reality about identity and poetry. William is speaking as a dead man: both as a man with a fatal wound doomed to die *and* as a poet who has already died long since. But to return to the above discussion of speaking and writing, the very fact that William is speaking and not writing suggests that he is alive and in the present, since "dead men don't talk." Thus, from the viewer's perspective, William Blake is both alive *and* dead. Or, more precisely, as Roland Barthes writes about a picture of a condemned prisoner: "He is dead and he is going to die" (95).

This triangle of identity, temporality, and death is constructed, moreover, around poetry as a form of both speech *and* writing. After telling William that he is a dead man, “Nobody’s” next reaction is to begin to recite Blake’s “Auguries of Innocence.”²⁷ He says:

Every night and every morn
Some to misery are born.
Every morn and every night

Some are born to sweet delight.
Some are born to sweet delight,
Some are born to endless night.

Here, the film once again links poetry to epitaph. Not only do these lines literally call to mind the type of *writing* often inscribed on a tombstone, they are also *spoken* in remembrance of the William Blake who is both dead and alive. Additionally, epitaph functions as a formal poetic strategy. Frances Ferguson, in writing about the poetry of William Wordsworth, argues that the “epitaph occurs when Wordsworth speaks of himself and of his former self” (155). Furthermore, this poetry constitutes “a series of epitaphs spoken *upon* former selves” (Wordsworth 155). To extend Ferguson’s argument, I would suggest that this epitaphic quality is found in all lyric poetry. The lyric poet always speaks of “himself and of his former self.” His past identity is simultaneously present in the poem, but by that very presence, he is also recognized as dead and absent; the very act of putting it into writing relegates it to the past. Indeed, this paradoxical conflation and co-existence of past and present have long been part of the discourse around poetry. T. S. Eliot writes: “[W]e shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his [the poet’s] work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously” (1093).

Ferguson echoes Eliot, writing that Wordsworth’s often anonymous epitaphs “reflect a drive to move beyond specific characters and specific communities” (158). That is, the strong poet is able to incorporate the past-ness of the past with the presence of the present. He recognizes that he speaks as a dead man about the past, but by writing, he is able to leave a trace that continues to speak in the present. Indeed, if we think of the process of signification, it always occurs in the present, since written marks from the past are continually deferred to be re-interpreted in the present. Perhaps Mill might have unintentionally said more than he meant about poetry, for the writing of the dead man is *always* overheard, since a dead man cannot be present to direct his address to anyone in particular. It might be preferable not to travel with a dead man like William Blake, but when he speaks, it is impossible not to listen.

In negotiating past and present, death and life, William thus exemplifies what Susan Stewart terms “lyric possession.” For her, there is always a form of lyric possession at work within a poet: “The meaning of *possession* here does not reside simply in the idea that the poet’s utterances are not original or reasoned. Rather, such utterances pass through the speaker by means of an external force” (35).

Building on Eliot, she argues that “the poet is both the agent and vessel of sense perception” (Stewart 36). That is, like Eliot’s strong poet, Stewart’s poet creates new meanings and new utterances, but that newness is “in fact the performance of something scripted in another context” (36). As Stewart points out, these ideas are as old as poetic criticism itself, going back to Plato’s *Republic*. However, for her, this different “context” is not the world of Platonic Form, but rather the very metrical structure of poetry itself. When a poet chooses to write in a certain way, that mode is already imbued with meaning by all the poems that have come before it, and thus the new lyric is spoken through by all of the old ones. Rather than being

²⁷ See William Blake, “Auguries of Innocence.” *The Selected Poems of William Blake*. (New York: Wordsworth Editions, 1994).

passively possessed, “a subject possessed by an unfathomable and external agency will place words into the social realm where they will continue their profoundly irresponsible effects or consequences” (38).

To put it simply: the poet speaks old words in new ways or in new contexts, and thus speaks and is spoken through. If we may change the sense of Mill’s dictum only slightly, we will still arrive at lyric as “utterance overheard,” not in terms of the audience, but in terms of influence. The poet is the one who has overheard something and is then re-uttering it.

This is exactly how the poet/accountant William Blake functions in the film. He speaks a language from the past in a new context. Midway through the film, as “Nobody” and William sit around their campfire, “Nobody” asks whether William knows how to use his gun. When he responds in the negative, “Nobody” continues: “That weapon will replace your tongue. You will learn to speak through it, and your poetry will now be written with blood.” “Nobody’s” language makes it unclear whether the poet or the gun will be doing the speaking, and in light of the above discussion, the answer would have to be both. But writer and instrument are not the only two things conflated. Even more significantly, as the film progresses, it becomes impossible at any one moment to discern whether the poet or accountant is the one speaking or acting. A few scenes later, “Nobody” performs a sacred ritual and has a vision of William Blake as a skeleton who speaks to him: a further conflation of the past/death with present/life. “Nobody” marks William Blake with paint as a visual trace of the way he has been marked by his past, and in the very next scene, he assumes the identity of poet and gunfighter. William confronts a pair of marshals who have been tracking him. When they ask whether he is William Blake, he responds: “Yes, I am. Do you know my poetry?” He then shoots them both. As one lies dying, William Blake stands over him and pronounces a sort of epitaph upon him, again drawn from Blake’s “Auguries of Innocence”: “Some are born to endless night.” Who is speaking here? Is it Blake the poet, or William Blake the gunfighter, or William the accountant who has heard that line from “Nobody”? Up until this point, William has been almost entirely passive. But, paradoxically, at the very moment of actively embracing his identity as a gunfighter and/or dead man, William Blake remains passive; he is acted upon, possessed by a past which is not his identity. It is this very tension between active and passive that underscores Stewart’s concept of lyrical possession. Through possession, Blake claims his identity through a language that is simultaneously his own and foreign.

Indeed, the cinema itself is structured around (dis)possession, and the splits and foreign-ness that it creates. Walter Benjamin recognized this early in the history of the cinema, writing: “The camera that presents the performance of the film actor to the public *need not respect the performance as an integral whole*” (228, emphasis mine). In other words, the very act of filming a performance maintains a split between voice, image, the performing body, and the actor’s identity. John Mowitt has taken this even further. He argues in “The Hollywood Soundtrack” that the cinema is structured around a fundamental split between image and voice, with image maintaining the privileged position (383). One goes to see a film or refers to the cinema as a motion *picture*. For Mowitt, voice and sound are something surplus or superimposed on the more fundamental imagery of the film. Even at a quite literal level, the soundtrack of a film is actually superimposed onto the pre-existing visual reels. Despite our cultural phonocentrism, film still privileges imagery. But this foreign-ness seems also to describe utterance in a wider context, including lyric poetry. Discussing the voice in psychoanalytic theory, Slavoj Žižek argues: “[T]he voice functions as a foreign body, as a kind of parasite introducing a radical split: the advent of the Word throws the human animal off balance and makes of him a ridiculous, impotent figure, gesticulating and striving desperately for a lost balance” (3).

Žižek is referring to the castrating effect of language or the divide between body and voice, but the notion of the voice as foreign also articulates the split between identities as such that reside within the “human animal.” Whichever voice William Blake speaks with, it is also a foreign voice: either the

accountant speaks as poet or the poet speaks as accountant. This personal voice made foreign not only takes the form of poetry or identity, but also finds its realization in the echo.

Echo

The concept of echoing is useful to help elucidate the paradoxes of epitaph, voice, and foreignness. In an echo, the speaker's voice itself becomes foreign. It becomes both temporally and spatially distanced from him. It is as if his own voice is speaking to him: it no longer sounds exactly like his voice, and though it speaks in the present, it is also speaking from the past. But, despite this split inaugurated by the voice, the echo also can connect. The echo connects the speaker to his past and to the world *through* his voice. The voice goes out in the utterance, but it returns to the subject in the echo. Ferguson likewise uses echo in her analysis of Wordsworth's poetry, and again, I would extend her argument to suggest that it is true of lyric in general. She writes of Wordsworth: "When an 'antithetical manner' is not antithetical, it becomes the equivalent of an echo" (Ferguson 162). For Ferguson, the echo provides a perfect means for understanding how seemingly opposite qualities, instead of negating each other, can in fact supplement and even "[extend] each other" (162). In turn, the echo itself becomes a perfect supplement to Stewart's concept of possession. Indeed, what else is lyric possession other than the echoing of past forms and past voices? Taken together, echo and possession perfectly describe the deconstruction of identity in *Dead Man*: the subject speaks and is spoken through, using a voice that is both personal and foreign, a voice that speaks from the past but echoes in the present.

Just as the film uses poetry to flesh out its concept of death, so too does it link poetry to the echo. The lines from Blake that "Nobody" recites demonstrate this linkage:

Every night and every morn
Some to misery are born.
Every morn and every night
Some are born to sweet delight.
Some are born to sweet delight,
Some are born to endless night.

Here, Blake's poem echoes itself, literally repeating itself with slight variation, like the variation of an echo on the human voice. More significantly at this point, these lines demonstrate how "ambiguity vexes antithesis itself" (162), to use Ferguson's language again. The antitheses of night and morn and night and delight are mixed up with the ambiguity of "some," and both night and morn become the site of both misery and delight. In other words, night is no longer antithetical to morn, since both can result in either delight or misery, and night as an ending can also be a time of birth or beginning. The two pairs—delight/misery and night/mourn—are not antithetical since they co-exist within the human form as a sort of birthright. As Ferguson suggests: "the man's qualities overlap and amplify one another, instead of warring against each other" (162).

In the scene where William Blake kills the two marshals, the film visually enacts this deconstruction of antithesis. William Blake speaks his epitaph, suggesting that the dying marshal was "born to endless night," and thus associating him with darkness and death. Immediately, the camera slowly pans from one dead marshal to the other. One is lying in the mud, whereas the other has fallen on a plant that resembles a sun or halo; as Cole later reflects, the dead marshal "Looks like a goddamn religious icon." But despite these oppositions of dark and light or night and morn, *both men look exactly the same*. Their faces look alike, and their fallen postures are precise mirror images of each other. Here, both morn and night become the site of misery and death. But, at the same time, the association of the dead marshal with a religious icon links him with sweet delight and the Christian afterlife. And, since both men appear to be the same man, they are simultaneously connected to "sweet delight" and "endless night." The poet, in speaking an

epitaph on them, which as Ferguson points out is a form of “universal commiseration” (160), is linked to them and hence to both “sweet delight” and “endless night.” In this scene, just as in the poem, the antithesis collapses inwards. Blake commiserates with them as both killer and as a man who is already dead. This commiseration through epitaph is quite literally enacted via an echo: Blake echoes the words of his poetic forbearer, and the film itself echoes the line of poetry first stated several scenes earlier. That is to say, echo embodies in language the sort of interaction that epitaph creates interpersonally: a voice from the past speaking in the present, a repetition with a difference, an antithesis that breaks down and combines into something new. The poet’s voice goes out into the world and echoes back in a slightly new form, but it still returns to him nonetheless. Through the echo, different voices and different times can exist for the speaker simultaneously, suggesting a metaphor for how identity can function through multiplicity and juxtaposition. In a word, the film suggests that identity always is constituted through the echoes of multiple voices and histories.

Though the film seems to suggest death as a means for interconnection with the past and for incorporating that past into one’s present sense of identity, the cultural connotation of death also invokes fear at the loss of the Self. Death might connect the individual with the past, but this past also threatens contemporary understandings of the self as a self-enclosed and essential entity free from outside influences. On the one hand, the logic of the film does not deny the validity of these fears. The fear of death as the loss of the Self is valid because that is exactly what happens: the singular Self dies. But on the other hand, that very death has the potential to inaugurate a new state of being. In that sense, death is a movement from an absolute I to an I that admits contradiction, juxtaposition, and the Other. Not coincidentally, that same movement occurs in Blake’s poetry: an achievement of a higher unity based on discontinuity. This higher unity, which is paradoxically based on a fragmented I, revolves around hybridity and performativity: the hybridity of lyric possession and the performativity of poetry and violence. This (dis)unity allows the subject to negotiate past and present, written and spoken, individual and collective. In this way, William, the accountant from Cleveland, dies, but William Blake is re-born, embodying multiple identities, multiple pasts, and multiple voices.

Jacques Lacan argues that these concepts—death and rebirth, performance and hybridity—come together in and arise from the mirror stage. In a parallel movement, the film articulates death as a mirror, both formally and conceptually. As William Blake approaches his death at the end of the film, “Nobody” tells him: “I will take you to the bridge made of waters. *The mirror*. Then you will be taken up to the next level of the world. The place where William Blake is from. Where his spirit belongs. I must make sure that you pass back through *the mirror* at the place... where the sea meets the sky” (emphasis mine).

“Nobody’s” description of death perfectly reflects the nature of death as rebirth into a new identity, and specifically invokes the mirror (stage) as a symbol for this new identity. The “next level of the world” is a higher unity based on discontinuity and antithesis: a “bridge made of waters” and “the next level” where the individual is paradoxically “from.” Just as in the earlier scene with the two marshals, where death seems to create a mirror image between the two men, William’s death creates a mirror held up to himself. Lacan argues that the child’s first glimpse of itself in the mirror is a moment of playfulness and performance: it

immediately gives rise in a child to a series of gestures in which he playfully experiences the relationship between movements made in the image and the reflected environment, and between this virtual complex and the reality it duplicates—namely, the child’s own body, and the persons and even things around him.
(3)

This is also a moment of mimicry: the child plays with his own image, but also models himself after it. Lacan writes of the “transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image—an image that is seemingly predestined to have an effect at this phase” (4). In other words, the child performs by

playing in front of the mirror, but this play is not completely free, as he is mimicking an image that is “seemingly predestined to have an effect.” Is this not also a perfect description of the experience of the lyric poet, as defined by lyric possession, echo, and epitaph? The poet, like the child, performs something old, something predestined, but he does so in a new context, in a new way. The poet, like the child, both takes control of the identity in the mirror, but likewise cedes control to it. The child gazes and is gazed at; the poet speaks and is spoken through.

This singular moment of the mirror stage encapsulates the creative dialectic that the lyric poet experiences via echo and epitaph. This dialectic results in transformation rather than synthesis. It does not make two parts into one synthetic whole, but rather results in two parts changed into something entirely new. Oppositions are juxtaposed, but then transformed into a higher unity: “a transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image” (Lacan 4). In the final moment of the film, this transformation is visualized *as* an image. As “Nobody” watches the fatally wounded William Blake drift away in a canoe, Cole enters from off screen and raises his gun to fire at Blake. Cole is dressed in black, “Nobody” in white. After Cole fires (and misses), “Nobody” turns, and both men raise and fire their weapons in unison, killing each other at the exact same time. If “Nobody” has been the guide to the next level and the higher world, then the sadistic Cole represents the underworld, a place of irrational violence, incest, and cannibalism. (One of the other bounty hunters says that Cole had sex with both of his parents before killing and eating them.) It is at this moment of death *at the mirror* that both men negate each other, in some sense literally—but more importantly—metaphysically. This is the sort of negative dialectic operative in Blake’s poetry as well as in the film: as pointed out above: “[T]his ambiguity vexes antithesis itself rather than the poem. For the man’s qualities overlap and amplify one another” (Ferguson 162). That is to say, at the moment of death *qua* mirror, the antithetical qualities of identity confront each other, but through death, they “overlap and amplify one another” as opposed to “vexing” or destroying each other. On the surface, it might appear that “Nobody” and Cole destroy each other, and in some sense they do, but there is something deeper going on here. They do not just murder each other; more importantly, they *mirror* each other. This sort of mirroring allows for negation on a literal level, but also allows for a higher unity based on this discontinuity: a type of paradoxical unity that characterizes identity itself. In other words, it is only through the destruction of the absolute I—only when it is negated and challenged by an opposing force, as the child experiences in the Lacanian mirror stage—that identity can exist as performance and hybridity. The individual becomes negated by the Other, but only in doing so can he be opened up to the potentiality of the Lacanian Real: the space *beyond* the mirror.

In this movement past the mirror, William Blake potentially goes beyond death into the other world, but likewise, he goes back to where he came from. (It should be noted that the ending of the film is highly ambiguous, and the status of the “other world” and William Blake’s journey into it remain unknown.) “Nobody” tells him as he pushes the canoe into the water: “It’s time for you to leave now, William Blake. Time for you to go back to where you came from”. William responds: “You mean Cleveland?” “Nobody’s” response elaborates on this confusion: “Back to the place where all the spirits came from... and where all the spirits return.” Death is thus a progression and a return, the exact notion of the psychoanalytic death drive: the individual feels compelled to repeat earlier stages of existence, namely the time before his birth, and thus desires to move *towards* a place he has already been to.²⁸ Within the film, at the moment of death, the dialogue returns to and echoes the opening of the film, where the train fireman associates Cleveland with a non-place. At the ending, Cleveland is conflated with the space beyond the mirror, the realm of death and nothingness. This is the final sort of epitaph of the film—the language spoken above the grave—but like the opening epitaph, this language collapses the distinctions between past, present,

²⁸ For more, see Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Trans. Gregory C. Richter. Buffalo: Broadview, 2011. Print.

and future; no-place and someplace; dead and alive; and Self and Other. The epitaph here is literally an echo: something “scripted in another context” but spoken again in a new one. Just like lyric poetry as epitaph and echo, the film returns to the past in the present, and in this return, unites both oppositions. Likewise, the Self goes out into the Other, resulting in negation and opposition, but also in a new hybridity. Finally, language itself becomes foreign—the echo of something already said—but that very foreignness allows for a new form of performativity. In a word, the film dramatizes the movement from absolute I to fragmented I via the inward collapse of Self/Other, past/present, speaking/writing, dead/alive, and foreign/natural. But of course, that very same “inward” collapse likewise demonstrates a radical expansion outwards, into new spaces, new contexts, and new possibilities. The viewer is left to wonder whether William Blake really does make it to the other world, and what form that other world would take. But the ambiguity is important. Like deconstruction itself, this expanded and performative notion of identity is something that can never be finally reached, but only sought after and approached asymptotically.

Conclusions

In this essay, I have shown how Jim Jarmusch’s *Dead Man* deconstructs various binaries in order to create a more expansive sense of hybrid identity. This deconstruction is accomplished through an interplay between echo and epitaph. It is also made uniquely possible by incorporating poetry into film, thus allowing an interaction between gaze and voice, and speech and writing. It must be emphasized that the work accomplished by the film is not just a vulgar postmodernist deconstruction that endlessly praises hybridity and paradox without ever coming to concrete conclusions about its subject matter. Instead, *Dead Man* makes concrete statements about identity by virtue of its status as a film, and specifically as a western. As a film that takes up poetry as its subject matter, *Dead Man* looks to the present and to the future, considering how new forms of media continue to shape and (re)frame our voices and sense of (self)perception. But as a western, the film looks to the past, specifically of the United States, in order to consider how histories of violence and colonial expansion continue to inflect identity in the present. Just as the content of the film looks to the past and future, so too does its meta-cinematic form. Just as the film portrays how the past speaks through the present, it likewise continues to speak through our present, two decades after its release, forcing us to confront the ever-changing nature of identity.

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Identity and Conflict in George Eliot’s Novels: The Self Vs. Society and Female Desire Vs. Male / Patriarchal Rule

Abstract: George Eliot represents one of the greatest Victorian writers, as she took over the development of the psychological novel from Samuel Richardson and Jane Austen and depicted Victorian society with both its mundane and daily features. The issues of identity and conflict are currently important as feminists have rediscovered Eliot’s writings, including essays and reviews, as they examined her works from the perspective of female education. This research delineates identity conflicts in George Eliot’s novels and in her private life by examining the manner in which the individual is depicted and/or is assimilated into society, and by analyzing the representation of the self and the female desire in comparison to male rule. We evince instances where the self and female desire are repressed by patriarchal society and other cases where they are compatible with the strict requirements of patriarchal society. We also highlight George Eliot’s enigmatic personality and the issue of her identity that today’s readers and critics examine alike. We consider this research paper relevant from a scientific point of view, as it includes multidisciplinary analytic elements of literary criticism, a psychoanalytic and feminist interpretation of her novels, essays, reviews, and private letters.

Keywords: identity, conflict, self, society, female, male, patriarchal

Introduction: Mary Anne Evans vs. George Eliot

The issue of identity is of paramount importance when we analyze George Eliot’s novels, as her dual nature has always puzzled her critics and readers alike: on the one hand, she possessed extraordinary intellectual capabilities that permitted her to perform the activities of translator, reviewer and editor before deciding to become a novelist; and, on the other hand, she was portrayed as “sibylline” and “enigmatic” (Carroll i) for numerous reasons, i.e. she took a male pen name, she lived without being married with a married man, she refused to support the 19th-century feminist movement. George Eliot began writing essays in 1852, when a crisis of values questioned the traditionalist view on Victorian customs, Carroll argues, and this crisis, caused by economic and social emancipation, can be noticed in her novels and essays. As a result, she writes the essay “Silly Novels by Lady Novelists,” 1856, in which she criticizes the shallowness of Victorian female writers by rendering clear negative examples. Eliot was interested in studying various subjects that women could not study in the Victorian age; unlike her contemporary female writers, she was fluent in six languages and had vast knowledge in arts—i.e. painting and music, history and sciences. Her interest in acquiring as much knowledge as possible in every field of interest may be noticed in her novels where it triggered the narrator’s insistence on education. By examining the theme of female education, Eliot underlines the Victorian woman’s lot that, at that time, exhibited woman’s total dependence on man. Thus, she argues that one significant action that woman ought to take was to become independent by getting a better education.

Mary Anne Evans, who used the male pen name of George Eliot, was one of the leading Victorian writers who employed narrative features corroborated with psychological investigation, philosophical, scientific, and artistic information that most writers and some of her fore-runners did not make use of in their writings. However, the acquired identity clashed with the initial one, that of Mary Anne Evans. The female writer’s identity conflict started with a crisis regarding the religious beliefs that the writer opposed to exhibit every Sunday by not going to the weekly Sunday Mass. Although her father reproached her for

not going to church, George Eliot only reached a compromise in order to enjoy the Coventry literary circle she was part of. During the group's talks, she became acquainted with Herbert Spencer and, his close friend, George Henry Lewes who later became George Eliot's lifelong partner. We have to mention Lewes' special situation of being unable to divorce his wife, although they lived separately with other partners.²⁹ Her nonconformist nature and her interest in foreign languages, philosophy, history and sciences helped her translate Spinoza, Feuerbach and Strauss's works, which led to her becoming an agnostic, although she had studied in an evangelical school. How does the radical thinker coexist with a traditional female writer who employs a male pen name? Did she adopt the pen name George Eliot for her works to be correctly commented on by Victorian critics?

George Eliot's identity conflict leads us to the 19th-century suffragette movement that fought for woman's rights in a patriarchal society. Although she was no advocate of the suffragette movement, as she considered that men and women were different and she maintained that women were not yet prepared for the full responsibility of making conscientious decisions through their votes, George Eliot supported the ideal of female education. In a personal letter she maintains that women could obtain their equal status mainly by getting a better education: "I believe—and I want it to be well shown—that a more thorough education will tend to do away with the odious vulgarity of our notions about functions and employment, and to propagate the true gospel that the deepest disgrace is to insist on doing work for which we are unfit—to do work of any sort badly" (*Letters*, IV, 425, qtd. in Dolin 147).

The theme of education is present throughout Eliot's novels as every novel discusses women's lot; it is the implied author who suggests that woman's life could be more valuable if she were permitted to do more than accomplish the tedious roles of wife and mother. In the present article, we will quote a fragment from *Middlemarch* further on, where the female protagonist's actions are at the center of the implied author's remarks.

George Eliot expressed her views in the reviews she wrote; one such review is the one she wrote on Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* entitled "Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft," published in *The Leader* in 1855. Amongst the highlights of the review, Eliot discusses the issue of natural differences existing between the sexes; this conflict is mentioned by Margaret Fuller, who states that women should be educated if they desire to convey their thoughts and in case they are not able to achieve this, it should be from "divine command, and not from men's tradition" (Fuller, qtd. in Eliot 135). Thus, women may become what they wish if they can fulfil men's duties as well as males, otherwise women's "powers" become "latent" (Eliot 134). Eliot also presents Mary Wollstonecraft's views on women's lot—in the 18th century Wollstonecraft considered that men were wrong to keep "up for a woman who can understand none of his secret yearnings, who is fit for nothing but to sit in her drawing-room like a *doll-Madonna in her shrine*" (Wollstonecraft, qtd. in Eliot 136, our emphasis). We consider that woman's lot, as portrayed by the two feminist writers whose writings are examined by Eliot in her review, is also present in Eliot's novels and it is the dialectical positions master/male and subject/female that arise as a result of patriarchal rule. In her review, Eliot subtly addresses her feminist contemporaries, who supported the 19th-century feminist movement, by underlining the fact that "both Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft have too much sagacity to fall in sentimental exaggeration" and she salutes their realistic portrayal of woman's lot as she herself would do later in her novels (Eliot 137). As we have mentioned before, it is Eliot's belief that art should guide readers into learning and not distort reality. This theme is also present in Eliot's political novel, *Felix Holt, the Radical*, as some critics claim.

The various disciplines that Eliot studied indicate the existence of the radical thinking that she employed in her novels to reach the climax when Victorian values were almost torn apart, David Carroll

²⁹ In the Victorian age a married man could not divorce his wife if he acknowledged the children as being his in advance.

argues in his book *George Eliot and the Conflict of Interpretations*, 1992. The Victorian values are presented by George Eliot in a traditional manner, including the social roles men and women played in the Victorian Age. Clear radical thinking is depicted in *Felix Holt, the Radical* where personal and common interests clash and characters have to make their best choices for themselves and for the community at the same time. Esther Lyon, the main female character, after discovering her noble origin, chooses real love over money and social position. Esther's choice can be generally met in George Eliot's novels, for she also made personal choices that rendered her an aura of a radical.

Female Desire vs. Male Power

Our intention is to present the conflicts that are portrayed in George Eliot's novels by underlining the struggle that probably existed in George Eliot's mind. We argue that George Eliot had a conflict of her own between her radical and traditional nature, which culminated with George Eliot's decision to marry after her lifelong partner died. However, her request to be buried next to George Henry Lewes in the artists' cemetery was rejected, as her conduct before the legal matrimony with J. W. Cross was considered unacceptable. Nonetheless, George Eliot's nonconformist nature does not influence her artistic principles that she makes clear in her essays, particularly in "The Natural History of German Life."

George Eliot's novels portray the self in its different stages of development, as described by Carl Gustav Jung:

The self does not become conscious by itself, but has always been taught, if at all, through a tradition of knowing... Since it stands for the essence of individuation, it is impossible without a relationship to one's environment, it is found among those of like mind with whom individual relations can be established. The self, moreover, is an archetype that invariably expresses a situation within which the ego is contained. Therefore, like every archetype, the self cannot be localized in an individual ego-consciousness but acts like a circumambient atmosphere to which no definite limits can be set, either in space or in time. (Hence the synchronistic phenomena so often associated with activated archetypes). (*Collected Works of C. G. Jung, Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*, par. 257, 1959)

The article has been created around Jung's vision of the self as archetype representing the unity between the conscious and the unconscious that undertake the process of individuation in order to form a whole personality (from "Transformation Symbolism in the Mass" in CW 11, par. 396). The self may be perceived in a two-fold perspective: first, the personal entity that each individual recognizes as his/her own personality and, second, the highest patriarchal image, i.e. the father who leads the family and society alike. In Eliot's novels, the self is portrayed in these two manners, i.e. the female characters that embody women are under the protection and guidance of their male counterparts, who, as the female characters' masters, can impose certain actions on the female personages. The process of self-becoming is called by Jung "individuation", which has at its core the ego that represents the basis of an individual's personality. Jung considers that the process of individuation connects the individual to society:

[i]ndividuation appears, on the one hand, as the synthesis of a new unity that previously consisted of scattered particles, and on the other hand, as a revelation of something that existed before the ego and is in fact its father or creator and also its totality. Up to a point, we create the self by making ourselves conscious of our unconscious contents, and to that extent it is our son. (from *Transformation Symbolism in the Mass* in *Collected Works 11*, par. 400)

The new whole is, in fact, our personality whose core, the ego, is the essential part of our being. Eliot's female characters undergo the process of individuation and reach different stages in their fictional evolution. For instance, Dorothea exhibits her completed self only after the death of Reverend Edward Casaubon; as a result, she is chastised by the patriarchal community in Middlemarch after she decides to

marry the younger cousin of her late husband. Even though she completes the process of her self-individuation, she cannot be considered a successful character, as she disobeys the moral rules of the Victorian society, i.e. a wife ought to respect her husband's wishes irrespective of her feelings.

The Victorian Age—a Looking Glass of Patriarchy

The Victorian Age represented an era when the Industrial Revolution stirred the development of the humankind. One significant effect of the Industrial Revolution was the invention of the rotary printing press, which led to the commercialization of books, at least a more intensive one than it had been before. As a result, patriarchal thought could be spread not only verbally, but also in print. Noteworthy for the Victorian Age were the books of conduct, which were created with the purpose of portraying the most important features a young lady ought to display and/or possess. However, these conduct books created the desired image of the submissive woman; such a guide was written by Sarah Stickney Ellis who, in 1830, declared that the most important feature of a woman "is to be content to be inferior to men, inferior in mental power in the same proportion that you are inferior in bodily strength" (qtd. in Swisher 11). Another famous writer of Victorian conduct books was Sarah Lewis who argued that women "are naturally disposed to reverence, to worship, to self-sacrifice, for the sake of a beloved object. These peculiar qualities, accompanied by *unenlightened intellect and narrow views* lead to the deeply inoculated inferiority of woman that George Eliot attempted to change and transform into woman's strength" (qtd. in Swisher 12, emphasis mine).

However emphatic Ellis and Lewis' discourse may appear, Ellis realizes and mentions the double standard created by women's instilled inferiority: "I never could imagine why little girls were to fetch and carry... while boys sat still and fancied themselves into lords of creation" (qtd. in Swisher 19). It is this mightiness, resulting from the immense marketing of conduct books, that made Victorian men become infatuated with their feeling of dominance. Consequently, woman's interest in delivering man the comfort that Victorian patriarchal society saw fit, triggered woman's need to be accompanied, as she became powerless and lacked the strength to fight for her right in a society that did not offer women the appropriate education that would help them obtain their independence.

The Victorian society is the society that most of Eliot's characters live in, with the exception of *Romola*, which, although contains many similar themes, is patriarchal in its nature; thus, the female characters can only play a less important role in the social life of a community than male protagonists. The double standard was a common policy in the Victorian society and it is present in all of Eliot's novels. *Romola*, with her Italian plot novel, introduces the eponymous female protagonist whose father does not permit her to play the role of a scholar, because she is a female. Romola's role is to offer her father the feeling of happiness by inviting different male scholars that he can partner with in theoretical discussions; thus, Romola delivers services, she does not accomplish her education received from her father in the same manner that men do. Romola's inner conflict is appeased when, by introducing Tito Melema, the young Greek scholar, to her father, she feels some satisfaction with achieving her filial duty. However, after marrying Tito, her conflict with her father turns into a conflict with her husband, after the latter sells her father's books that Romola has inherited from him. Hence, she decides to leave the city of Florence for she is heart-broken, when she is stopped by Savonarola who reminds her of the duty every Christian ought to accomplish, i.e. to help one's family and other members of the community. Even though Romola feels betrayed by her husband, she tries to follow Savonarola's advice. However, when the political unrest breaks out and Romola learns that Tito has betrayed her and her family the second time, she leaves him and the city of Florence again. It is at this point that she also learns about her husband's second family and about his two children with Tessa. Even though Savonarola is condemned and burned alive, Romola follows his teachings and helps the others, especially Tessa and her two children, when plague breaks out in their village. Romola is generally perceived by critics as a successful female character whose existence turns

from an individual perspective into a general or social one. Romola's inner conflict against society is two-fold, as she is first isolated for being a female by her own father and is betrayed twice by her husband. Her female desire cannot overcome the patriarchal rule; Romola's capacity to show her sympathy to the victims of the plague through self-sacrifice makes her a successful character.

In George Eliot's novels the opposition between female desire and male rule represents the central point of the interpersonal relations existing in every plot. Although the desire of many female characters clashes against the male rule, there are several female protagonists that are satisfied with their restful lives. In *Middlemarch*, Celia Brooke and Rosamund Vincy are the female characters that are the closest to the "Angel-in-the-House" female Victorian ideal. Celia's ideal marriage and child, on the one hand, and Rosamund's interest in social status, on the other, turn the two female characters into the foils for Dorothea Brooke. The plot is set between 1832 and 1834 and it focuses on the changes brought about by the Great Reform in 1832. Dorothea is brought up together with her sister, Celia, by their uncle, Mr Brooke, who is tempted to become a politician, but his political ideology does not attract much support on the part of the voters. Dorothea is portrayed as a self-sacrificial person whose self-interest is left aside in order to help others or do as others tell her to. Her surprising marriage to Reverend Edward Casaubon baffles many people, including her sister, who tries to dissuade her from going through with it and Sir James Chettam, the landowner who seems to be in love with Dorothea. Unlike Casaubon, he is the one who helps and encourages her to devise plans to improve the living conditions of the tenants on the estate. Dorothea seems to be in the center of a dispute all the time, irrespective of its significance—she intends to build new lodgings for the tenants, but her uncle rejects her proposal, she volunteers to help Casaubon to research and finish his study on *Key to All Mythologies*, but he refuses her help: later in the novel, she finds out that her husband has not even begun writing the mythological study that he wants her to do research on, as he asks her after they find out about his serious illness. The tension begins when she is interested in encountering Will and is rejoicing in their meetings, which leads to Casaubon's attack of jealousy that culminates with the mention in his will of the interdiction that Dorothea marry Will in the event of Casaubon's death. In Dorothea's case, an inner conflict turns into a social one when the female character makes her own mind, preferring to listen to her soul rather than to the expectations of patriarchy. She acts against her husband's request as written in the codicil. The will reveals an everyday reality of the Victorian Age, namely that, when women married, their husbands became the rightful owners of their fortune. Thus, although Dorothea has a high enough social status, still, she becomes dependent on her husband's financial support. Dorothea and Will are attracted to each other the moment they are introduced, when she and Casaubon are on honeymoon in Rome. Dorothea shows her strong character when, against all odds and contrary to the Middlemarch community's "final" and disapproving decision on Dr Lydgate's presumed actions, she exhibits her support in the public eye. The same psychological strength is displayed when she decides to marry Will Ladislav and lose her social status and financial security. At this point, Dorothea's identity clashes with the patriarchal rule and triggers the narrator's comment on the waste of such a strong female mind that plays the common roles of wife and mother:

Many who knew her, thought it a pity that so substantive and rare a creature should have been absorbed into the life of another and be only known in a certain circle as a wife and mother. But no one stated exactly what else that was in her power she ought to have done—not even Sir James Chettam, who went no further than the negative prescription that she ought not to have married Will Ladislav (Eliot 780-81).

The implied author deplores Dorothea's lot, revealing the general situation of women rather than simply the personal circumstances of the character, as the roles of wife and mother were considered to be the main vocations of women in the Victorian Age. The public, patriarchal perception of Dorothea's deed is expressed through her brother-in-law's opinion. However, he is to reconsider this opinion when his wife is

sad for not being able to see her sister and her new-born baby boy and they pay a visit to Dorothea, Will and their baby. Sir Chettam's attitude is similar to the general public opinion that accepts them tacitly at the end of the novel; but Dorothea's female desire comes second to the patriarchal rule, for she cannot benefit from any fortune. The psychological process of individuation that Dorothea undergoes affects her social status as, by acting according to her desire to marry Will Ladislaw, she does not respect her husband's wish or the patriarchal order. David Carroll argues that George Eliot was aware of the crisis the Victorian age was experiencing during her lifetime and, as a result, she introduced different types of plots that ought to "guide" her readers. In *Middlemarch* several characters, both female and male, face moral, financial, or sentimental crises as their fictional actions are analyzed from the perspective of obeying the patriarchal rules.

The issue of woman's identity as mother is discussed by Julia Kristeva, the French feminist critic, who claims that a mother's identity is connected to her child. The changes that occur in the mother are part of the rituals that the mother performs. Kristeva signals the idleness and tediousness that the mother has to fight against:

No identity holds up. A mother's identity is maintained only through the well-known closure of consciousness within the indolence of habit, when a woman protects herself from the borderline that severs her body and expatriates it from her child. Lucidity, on the contrary, would restore her as cut in half, alien to its other—and a ground favorable to delirium. But also and for that very reason, motherhood destines us to a demented *jouissance* that is answered, by chance, by the nursling's laughter in the sunny waters of the ocean. What connection is there between it and myself? No connection, except for that overflowing laughter where one senses the collapse of some ringing, subtle, fluid identity or other, softly buoyed by the waves. (*Stabat Mater* 179-180).

The identity of women is regulated according to patriarchal laws that impose standardized roles for both men and women. The image of the mother is present in all of Eliot's novels: there are mothers who embody the paragon of perfection in the role they play, i.e. Mrs. Garth, Mrs. Meyrick, but there are also mothers that teach their daughters to be vicious in their attempt to make a good marriage and ascend the social ladder, so that they have access to the upper-class society, i.e. Mrs. Vincy and Mrs. Davilow, to some extent. Julia Kristeva argues that a mother's existence is limited by the child—as a mother, a woman can either feel connected to an unfamiliar human being, and this fact can lead to depression, or she can feel that being's emotions that transgress into her own feelings of joy and happiness. These positive feelings are portrayed by Eliot when she depicts the later aforementioned female characters, who are also mothers depicted in a patriarchal society.

The patriarchal society is restrictive not only to females, but also to foreigners or other ethnic groups that try to settle in the British society. Eliot's novels depict such characters that are perceived by other characters as outsiders, as they would be viewed by British society, in real life. George Eliot advocated the principle of sympathy that could help people appreciate common values and understand differences. Eliot utilized this principle not only when discussing the differences between woman and man, but also when depicting foreigners and members of other ethnic groups, for instance Germans or Jews. Eliot successfully portrayed the Jewish community in *Daniel Deronda*, where an upper-class young man, Daniel, stops a Jewess from committing suicide, Mirah Lapidoth. Eliot masterfully creates a two-plot narrative where the female protagonist, Gwendolen Harleth, represents the hermetic British society. In fact, Gwendolen meets two non-British characters that help her realize she should reconsider her artistic aspirations: first, she auditions for the German-Jewish Herr Klesmer, who bluntly explains that she does not possess the artistic qualities needed and is not able to work hard in order to acquire them to become a singer and, second, she listens to Mirah, a Jewish young woman, who is a "professional" singer and marvels the audience. There is no conflict between the two female characters because they are already the victims of patriarchal

rule: Gwendolen has to marry Henleigh Mallinger Grandcourt in order to help her mother and step-sisters lead a good life, while Mirah was almost sold by her father to one of his acquaintances. We consider that Gwendolen's evolution from her self-interested nature to altruistic nature is a psychological *bildungsroman* in which George Eliot achieved the best such portrayal.

There are several instances where such characters are involved in dialectical tensions that trigger certain typical actions or reactions on the part of the subjects of patriarchal society, such as obeying the Law of the Father which is at its basis. The "Law of the Father" mainly supposes the fact that the father or the male figure is the ruler in a family. The term was used by Freud and Lacanian analysts to designate the existence of patriarchal thought in society, i.e. there are certain individuals, mostly men and fewer women, who hold the power over and command other people, both men and women, due to their social and financial status. The leaders, however, have to be aware of the fact that they can take only certain actions that are permitted by the law designed according to patriarchal thought (Murray 80-86). The Law of the Father is representative for patriarchal society as it imposes a certain line of action that can become paradoxical as women who hold the power, even as queens, as was the case of Queen Victoria, have to admit the limits of their gender which implicitly become their own. Such a paradox can lead to the identity issues that George Eliot examined in her novels and to her own possible questions regarding her identity, i.e. a female writer who takes a male pen name and who directly works with men that run publishing houses.

The issue of identity is present in *The Mill on the Floss* where the main female character is torn between her female desire and the decision of her father, i.e. not to meet Philip Wakem anymore, as his father was the one who would get their house and land after a legal conflict. For Maggie, identity represents a social construct, as she changes her natural way of behaving and thinking into a desired behavior and moral and ethical type of thinking corresponding to the Victorian patriarchal manner. Maggie finds herself in the middle of two conflicts that decide her tragic fate: first, she is torn between her family's expectations, whose life strictly depends on the Law of the Father represented by her father, then by her brother, and her female desire, as related to Philip, and, second, she is torn between her family and society's expectations and her female desire, as related to Stephen Guest, her cousin's fiancé. Although Maggie's character has a tragic end, she is a successful character as she exhibits the values that Victorian society expected its members to show, for she comes to the rescue of her brother when St. Oggs' is flooded.

Conclusions

The female self, in Eliot's novels, is muzzled by the patriarchal rule which imposes a double standard for men and women; men have liberty of action, access to public life and freedom of choice while women do not. In the Victorian Age, as in George Eliot's novels, women, or female characters, were perceived as passive and submissive; some of Eliot's female characters are not part of the moral and ethical pattern, as they act against Victorian values. In the Victorian Age, women were imposed a limited variety of careers, one of them was becoming a writer. Eliot herself did not think she was a good enough writer even though she was already a reviewer, translator and editor at the *Westminster Review* beginning with 1850. However, she was encouraged to become a novelist by her lifetime partner George Henry Lewes before she wrote *Scenes of Clerical Life*. In her works, Eliot transmitted the values and principles she believed in, i.e. sympathy, her realist literary creed, morality and ethics, as well as her vast knowledge of history, foreign languages and cultures, and arts.

George Eliot's works are focused on the life of the individual placed at the core of the life of a community. The role of educator of social classes that Eliot took seriously in her novels is present in her essays, too; we have used her essays and reviews in order to identify key elements of her artistic creed

and ideological views. She depicts the self, both male and female, as being built, for the former, and fractured, for the latter, by the patriarchal society. George Eliot's novels portray the Victorian age, except *Romola* which portrays the Florentine Renaissance society, and the struggles that people faced then, i.e. the Industrial Revolution and its effects on people's lives, the political reform or the lot of women. In her novels, Eliot presents the female self that is assigned different roles that form the female identity in the Victorian age and/or patriarchal society. The female self as portrayed in George Eliot's novels is at times in dialectical tensions with patriarchal rule, as has been presented (Dorothea Brooke, Maggie Tulliver, *Romola* di Bardi, Gwendolen Harleth); however, there are several instances where the female self leads a consensual existence with the male self (Celia Brooke, Rosamund Vincy, Mary Garth). The conflicts existing between male and female characters often end with the victory of male rule; this leads to the struggle of the self to keep the individual's identity in the Victorian society which, we consider, imposed a collective and well-defined identity for the representatives of both sexes.

We have also analyzed George Eliot's identity conflict and her views on female education, that she believed was the best solution for women to become intellectually independent in a male-dominated society such as the Victorian one. Eliot perceived the tensions between the sexes as a chance for reconciliation in respecting the other and his/her different features and, at the same time, for searching similar interests that can generate new conversations. George Eliot's identity conflict mildly affected her works, for the novels do not include atheism or any other types of radical thinking that the author believed in, but she probably considered them inadequate in the Victorian society, as she thought that a writer ought to be responsible and convey realist principles and values, to educate the classes, similarly to John Ruskin's views regarding the arts.

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Crossing the Boundaries: From Irishness to Britishness and Beyond

Abstract: The paper intends to explore a series of strategies employed by Oscar Wilde in order to achieve a transnational dimension for his art and artistic persona.

Among these, we can mention: the subverting of the official colonial discourse of power, the promotion of a transnational type of art and literature, which reflects, however, indirectly the writer's Irish origin, the subversive treatment of the British establishment and of favorite themes of the Victorian colonial empire through the reversion of the hierarchies established by the economy of the dominant patriarchal discourse and the reconsideration of the power relations within the binary couples masculine/feminine, colonizer/colonized.

Last but not least, it will assess the relevance of Wilde's choice of French for the play *Salomé* in shaping the artist's personality as a "complex, multiform creature," who needs to self-invent continuously by experimenting with foreign languages and spaces.

Keywords: national identity, mimicry, pastiche, colonizer/colonized, Irishness/Britishness, dandy, Victorianism

Introduction

During one of their first meetings, Yeats is reported to have told Wilde: "I envy men who have become mythological while still living." 'I think a man should invent his own myth,' retorted the latter" (Ellmann 283). Wilde's self-declared genius no less than his talent was consciously put to work towards the construction of a myth of his own, as he earnestly believed: "One should either be a work of art, or wear a work of art" (Collins 1206). In his case, the complementariness of 'either—or' switched to the inclusiveness of 'both—and,' as he matched sartorial elegance in his posing as a dandy with special stylistic and aesthetic expressions in his writings.

There were two main factors underlying his self-invention strategies: his scholarly Hellenistic formation and his hyphenated Anglo-Irish origin. Nevertheless, his account of identity would not be complete unless we took into consideration the influence of French symbolism and especially Baudelaire and Huysman's Decadent poetry and prose in the making up of an art and artist that appear organically intertwined. Furthermore, the development of his personality and art was connected with three major aspects of his life: a lifelong performance of Englishness, his late-discovered homoerotic interests and his tortuous romance with Roman Catholicism, which ended in deathbed conversion. In his earnest devotion to each of these aspects, the artist had to deploy ever more elaborate strategies of self-representation, which involved various forms of posing, acting and duplicity.

Wilde's desire for a self of his own invention, constructed by ever more refined divisions and self-reflexive processes, implied a high degree of self-awareness and the employment of duplicitous strategies, as both history and personal experience have to be continuously rewritten according to the self-contradictory demands of the artist's allotropic personality.

The artist's complex identity is hence the result of changing places and adopting different narrative voices as an author at different stages of his life; according to Stuart Hall: "the concept of identity is a strategic and positional one: identities are constructed within, not outside discourse [...] produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies" (17).

Analysis

Born in Dublin in a family of Anglo-Irish gentry, Wilde has shaped his life, art and artistic persona on the duality of his origin and his scholar education. "A member of the leading class known as Anglo-Irish, Wilde created himself by living on both sides of the hyphen" (McCormack, "Wilde's fiction(s)" 102). The author's hyphenated, cross race origin, as well as the particular historical and cultural context in which he evolved, contributed to the making up of a unique complex, protean identity that "bore within itself strange legacies of thought and passion" (Collins 107).

A further layer to Wilde's complex identity will be added by the dramatic experience of his imprisonment. In *De Profundis*, Wilde himself acknowledged that "the two great turning-points of my life were when my father sent me to Oxford, and when society sent me to prison" (Collins 1020). Between these two turning points in his life, Wilde developed a unique art and personality marked by contradictions, continuous revisions, spiritual conversions and moral relapses.

Wilde's hyphenated origin as a descendant of a family of colonizers on the verge of becoming part of the colonized territory, as well as his own tribulations, will sharpen the force of his argument with the colonial establishment. The artist would appear as both an outsider and part of the Victorian empire. Consequently, Wilde's identity cannot be at any moment conceived as either pure, or simple. To the complexity which naturally arose from his hyphenated, hybrid identity (one of his ancestors was Dutch), he added further layers through his art, consciously obscuring or revealing certain aspects of his personal history.

As he developed more and more refined self-invention strategies, Wilde drew on his scholarly Hellenistic formation and his hyphenated Anglo-Irish origin. The artist's own problematic condition as a Protestant Irishman forced to speak the language of the colonizer was inherently reflected in the innovative way he chose to manipulate the colonizer's imposed language, enriching it with speech figures of Irish origin, altering its semantic foundation and refining it to near perfection.

Thus, Wilde's art and eclectic identity primarily emerged from his experiencing the difference between two antagonistic cultural spaces, a difference which he deliberately used and abused in various manners.

His writings reveal some of the deliberate artistic methods Wilde chose to construct his art and social persona on the borderline between antagonistic categories of identity: oxymoron, paradox, irony, syntactic inversion—stylistic devices meant to point as well to his own problematic ethnical, sexual and even religious identity. "Born into an oxymoron, and doomed to live out his life as paradox, Wilde became adept at living on both sides of the hyphen" as "he was both Irish and British, both a mock-aristocrat and avowed republican" (McCormack, "Introduction" 1) a Protestant leading a lifelong romance with the Catholic Church, an unfaithful husband indulging in homoerotic practices.

Notwithstanding, Wilde's art and personality are far too complex to be construed only as the simple result of the conflation of two apparently opposed cultural spaces. From his early writings, the writer strove to give a transnational dimension to his art by exploring themes and motifs held as universal, which he rewrote in a different manner as he built up a critical discourse that revisited, recycled and refashioned previous artistic styles and topics. To this purpose, Wilde drew heavily on the Hellenistic Hebrew Christian heritage of the European cultural space, which, in a rather postmodern manner, he undermined at the same time.

Wilde was among the first writers to recognize the importance of cultural exchanges in defining national and cultural identity; in "The Critic as Artist" Gilbert, one of the characters that speaks on Wilde's behalf, states that "it is only by contact with the art of foreign nations that the art of a country gains that individual and separate life that we call nationality" (Collins 1033). His works, which abound in cross-cultural references, allusions and free quotations can also be read as complex intertexts meant to promote a transcultural model of art and literature and a universalist approach to culture.

Wilde has generally been regarded as an English writer and his works have always been included in the British literary canon; however, to a number of Irish critics, Wilde's reading as an Irish writer "makes every difference" (McCormack, "Introduction" 3). One can detect several elements of Irishness both in Oscar Wilde's works and life:

1) mostly indirect, oblique, in his stories (especially in *A House of Pomegranates*, the Celtic Orientalism rich in metaphors in *The Young King*, *The Fisherman and his Soul*, *The Star-Child*; in *The Happy Prince*—heavy utilitarianism, a British feature opposed to charity and loyalty expressed by the Celt nature). Wilde's sympathy with the oppressed, the outcast, the abused, reflects his artistic resistance to the British Victorian dogmas of social order, stability and control at the price of great suffering for its weak subjects.

2) Wilde's particular use of the English Language which, in his case, held the paradoxical position of both mother tongue and the colonizer's idiom; according to McCormack, the artist's perfect mastery of English was also intended as a "refined response to the linguistic terrorism exercised by the colonizer" ("The Wilde Irishman" 93). The Irish critic points out certain formal strategies which testify for Wilde's indebtedness to the Irish tradition: excessive interest in verbal decorations, repetitions, digressions; orality versus scripturality, often reflected in the dialogical aspect of certain of his writings.

3) The critique of Englishness and British institutions of knowledge and Realist English Literature also emerges in his critical essays: "The Decay of Lying," "The Critic as Artist," "The Soul of Man under Socialism" and reaches its peak in his comedies of manners. The subversive treatment of the British establishment and of certain favorite themes of the Victorian colonial empire, the reversion of the hierarchies established by the economy of the dominant patriarchal discourse and the reconsideration of the power relations within the binary couples—masculine/feminine, colonizer/colonized—are also strategies of self-empowerment; they are conceived from the standing point of an outsider and may also be deemed to indirectly reflect an Irish viewpoint.

Wilde's relation to his cultural origin was ambivalent: his eulogy of great English writers like Shakespeare and Keats, an overt ambition to be counted as one of them, the efforts to discard all traces of Irishness (starting with his accent) the moment he became a student at Oxford, his subsequent adherence to the British lifestyle and his gentlemanly pursuits and tastes are as many arguments that could temper enthusiastic critics ready to consider Wilde mainly as an Irish writer of English language.

In *Wilde the Irishman*, a number of contemporary Irish critics trace back the way Wilde's art and his own myth emerged at the interface between the Irish oral tradition and the British written one. They basically claim that Wilde's work is part of the Irish cultural legacy and that it cannot be properly construed nor understood unless one takes into consideration the Irish perspective. For Jerusha McCormack, for instance, Wilde's reading as an Irish writer "makes every difference" and she highlights the link between Wilde's unique destiny as a writer and artist and his origin in a country that favored the dreamers and the liars.

Such an endeavor implies a further reconsideration of the status of the artist and of "the strategies by means of which he inscribes himself in the narrative and his own story (stories) in history." McCormack comes up with some interesting reflections on the conflation of oral and written features in Wildean fictional texts, especially his tales which mingle both written and oral features, amounting to a sort of hybrid form, "a literary fairy tale" ("The Wilde Irishman" 102). Analyzing their original content and form she assumes that "they accurately reflected the situation of diglossia in his native culture, for Wilde was writing at a turning point for Ireland when, of two divergent cultures—the rural and oral, the urban and

literate—the balance was beginning to be tipped towards the latter” (McCormack, “The Wilde Irishman” 102).

She assumes that Wilde came from a country which gives a privileged status to fiction, regarding it as the very basis of society, as it regulated every aspect of people’s life and often acted as an interpreter between a man and his conscience (McCormack, “The Wilde Irishman” 97), and concludes that since

fiction is the very stuff by which society is made, Wilde could only become a writer—and an Irishman—in England because only there he could create himself through the fictions which formed the channel of communication between nation and nation, the stereotypes by which one understood the other. A member of the leading class known as Anglo-Irish, Wilde created himself by living on both sides of the hyphen (McCormack, “The Wilde Irishman” 102).

The presence of the Irish influence is neither blatant nor singular in Wilde’s works; his fairy tales, for instance, are literary hybrids conflating features and themes belonging to different literary genres and cultural spaces (such is the case of *The Fisherman and his Soul*, which display a rich decadent Orientalist imagery in old biblical overtones). McCormack observes that

in comparison with Yeats’s *Fairy and Folk Tales* of the Irish peasantry [...] Wilde’s construction of his Irishness is circumspect and oblique, refracted through the literary tradition of the Anglo-Irish gentry, rather than drawn from the pure springs of native folklore. What marks Wilde as a writer of his own class is his preference for fantasy over realism; [...] for a fracture between plot and discourse, in which action is suspended indefinitely for a kind of logorrhea, to the extent that the only interest of the tale is an engagement of language with itself as a kind of pure verbal decoration. (“The Wilde Irishman” 102)

Another critic, Kiberd, traces Wilde’s dramatic strategies of self-invention to his decision to make his life abroad; as soon as he debarked in England, he proceeded to reconstruct his image through the cultivation of various poses based on the art of elegant inversion, which implied the reversion of all the norms of his Irish childhood. Thus, according to Yeats, Wilde in England “perpetually performed a play which was in all things the opposite of all that he had known in childhood and youth. The artist’s lifelong performance of ‘Englishness’ turned such notion into a parody, and the seriousness of Victorian values into the subject of a comedy of manners” (Kiberd 11).

While certain contemporary Irish writers reproached Wilde with these camouflage techniques and even saw in Wilde’s career an act of national apostasy, Yeats considered “Wilde’s snobbery and parody of Englishness as the clever strategy of an Irishman marooned in England, whose only weapon against Anglo-Saxon prejudice was to become more English than the English themselves, thereby challenging many time-honored myths about the Irish” (Kiberd 15).

Therefore, to Wilde as well as to other Irish writers, lying as fiction naturally presented itself as the most appropriate means to restore the proper and simple meaning of the words, hackneyed by a century-long social, cultural and ethnical conflict. Furthermore, Kiberd estimates that “English literature had a liberating effect on Wilde” as “it equipped him with a mask behind which he was able to compose the lineaments of his Irish face, a strategy to be followed by other decolonizing writers” (22).

Wilde himself was fully aware of his unstable position as a person of a hyphenated origin, which made him continuously reconsider his idiom and his attitudes. He had to surmount difficulties raised by the employment of a language other than that of his ethnic community, and to find new artistic strategies by which “the concentrated race-experience” (*Collins 1048*), the Irish imagination grounded in an oral tradition, could find its best expression in a culture that favored the written and the rational. Above all, he wanted to be acknowledged as an accomplished man of letters and a gentleman by the very Victorian high society, which he depicted with lashing irony in his plays. Wilde’s achievement was even more spectacular,

as his difference and superiority were to be expressed from within the colonizer's idiom, the English language.

To devise a typology that would consider Wilde as an English hybrid of Irish extraction, one has to look for more formal ways in which the writer fashioned and re-invented himself on the borderline between Irish orality and British scripturality. His endeavor was furthermore fueled by his formal education in Classical Literature. McCormack mentions that "he was the nephew of three clergymen" and "while at Oxford he had also been engaged in close textual study of the New Testament" ("The Wilde Irishman" 100); she assumes that "work in either field would have alerted him to the oral nature of the written text" and of "its original, variable, improvised form which had been fossilized over almost two millennia of controversy" ("The Wilde Irishman" 100). Since "as an Irishman, Wilde came from one of the most oral cultures in Europe," his rebellion against British authority would find an expression in such "a strike against the axiom of the Bible's origin in a single, inscribed text... against the very ground of sacred authorship, authorized by centuries of official imprimatur" (McCormack, "The Wilde Irishman" 100).

There are several aspects of orality in Wilde's oeuvre, which can also be taken to account for a certain lack of originality in his choice of themes, an option fully compensated by a singular treatment in point of form. Analyzing the type and role of the oral elements in Wilde's writings, Deirdre Toomey points out that "the agonistic structure found in *The Decay of Lying* and *The Critic as Artist*, the lack of a hierarchy between text and interpretation..., Wilde's love of the aphorism... are typical of the oral mode" (28).

Wilde's Irishness, however, should be rather presumed than plainly assumed, as it emerges slyly in his texts, not so much by self-assertiveness nor by overt interest in Irish national issues, but rather by referring to British people as stupid, unimaginative and dullard. "England"—he complained in the *Decay of Lying*—"is the home of lost ideas" (Collins 1074). In his ambivalent attitude towards "Englishness," in the ironical treatment of Victorian themes, ideals or institutions and in the clever manipulation of the English language and British favorite topics, one can detect Wilde's attempt at recovering the "lost ideas" to the benefit of a transnational type of art. One can also envisage Wilde's artistic enterprise as a clever form of Celtic revenge on the British colonizer, a strategy of self-empowerment through a cultural conquest of the enemy's alien space.

Therefore, his duplicitous approach to art and life may be better understood in connection with the evolution of his personal destiny and his strategy of self-invention and self-effacement under the conditions imposed by the adoption of a British identity and life-style. The process involved the employment of ever more refined masks and poses, which the artist chose to wear in different places and dramatic situations of his life-stage. Ellmann found an element of self-construction and self-adjustment in his indolence and languid poses (259).

The author's hyphenated, complex origin as well as the further developments in his life contributed to the shaping of a "complex, multiform creature personality that bore within itself strange legacies of thought and passion" (Collins 107).

McCormack believes that in embracing this fate, Wilde redefined what it meant to be Irish, i.e. to have multiple, and divided loyalties—to be both colonizer and colonized, native and official [...] "to inhabit a space where contraries meet and are transvaluated into something else, a something which by definition escapes definition: to be in a provisional and mutating stage, not a recognized state, but a state of mind" ("Introduction" 3).

Wilde's peculiar use of the English language also represents a devious strategy of cultural empowerment and a refined response to the linguistic control exercised by the British colonizer over a more imaginative nation of dreamers and liars.

If instances of "straight" Irishness are difficult to pinpoint in Wilde's works, there are instead plenty of negative references to British people, institutions and mentality, which clearly disengage the artist from a firm colonizer position.

The harsh treatment of the Victorian ideals and institutions in *The Happy Prince*, the spoiled image of the British Empire in the poem *Theoretikos* and the indirect critique of the Victorian society in Wilde's comedies of manners may be deemed to represent various forms of Irish mutiny which call into question the official discourse of power; his anti-British stance is strongly revealed in contrast to the Victorian utilitarian values of money-making, scientific truth and technological progress.

Regenia Gagnier outlines the Victorian socio-cultural background underlying the complex position held by Wilde in relation to the art and culture of his age. The critic explores the relation between Wilde and the Victorian society, his transvaluation of values and special investment in personality and makes some interesting remarks on the modernist, even postmodernist thrust of his ideas; she highlights the modernity of the Victorian age, with its values of progress, technology, global markets and individualism and Wilde's paradoxical attitude.

The Victorians agonized over values—family values, British values, value as use or exchange—while Nietzsche revealed value as a fraud, a tool of domination of some over others, on the one hand, and promoted a radical perspectivism or skepticism, on the other. Wilde, a figure of paradox and contradiction, participated in both modern value critique and post-modern perspectivism. (Gagnier 18)

The doctrine of utilitarianism triggered a sense of futility and sharp bitterness on the part of art makers. When everything is weighed and praised in terms of money value or practical utility, the artist feels his duty to emphasize the uselessness of his art in opposition to the mercantile preoccupations of his age: "All art is quite useless" wrote Wilde in the Preface to PDG.

Such vision lies at the core of most Wildean works; an early poem like *Theoretikos* sets the mood and conveys the artist's sense of bitterness when faced with the harsh realities and heavy duties of everyday life in Victorian times; it also envisages a solution: the retreat to contemplative life, only possible in the realm of art. The subject will subsequently be developed in *The Critic as Artist*, where Wilde claims that the attaining of βίος θεωρητικός i.e. the life "that has for its aim not *doing* but *being*, and not *being* merely, but *becoming*" is the true ideal for artists; such superior type of life, in the artist's opinion, can only be achieved through the cultivation of the critical spirit.

The poem depicts the ugly unimaginative reality that the artist has to cope with: the mighty (British) empire with its feet of clay (a reference to its ethnic and social fragility), "the vile traffic-house," a striking metaphor expressing the tragic degradation of the former agora, the place of idea-exchange, into the marketplace of money-changers in the age of utilitarianism where "wisdom and reverence are sold at mart" and the artist has to put up with "the ignorant cries" of the rude people against the cultural "heritage of centuries." His sole consolation can be found in a wishful retreat into "dreams of Art and loftiest culture."

Wilde's complaint against the British government as an official system of repression, which tortured and deformed the individual by imposing unnecessary inhumane rules on him, also places him in the position of a foreigner.

For instance, in *The Case of Warder Martin, Some Cruelties of Prison Life*, a letter addressed to the *Daily Chronicle*, he reacts against a blind, cruel and impersonal authority, pointing that it "is as destructive to those who exercise it as it is to those on whom it is exercised." "Ordinary cruelty" he declares

is simply stupidity. It is the entire want of imagination. It is the result in nowadays of stereotyped systems, of hard-and-fast rules, and of stupidity. Wherever there is centralization there is stupidity. What is inhuman in modern life is officialism. Authority is as destructive to those who exercise it as it is to those on whom it is exercised. (Collins 1060)

A more refined means of undermining the British colonial discourse involves contesting it from within, turning it against itself by imitative, parodic use of its major themes and subject-matter. The bitter ironic treatment of the Victorian ideals and institutions in *The Happy Prince*, the spoiled image of the British Empire in the poem *Theoretikos* and the indirect critique of the Victorian society in Wilde's comedies of manners can be assumed to represent as many forms of Irish mutiny, which were meant to call into question the official discourse of power; once more, his anti-British stance is revealed in contrast to the Victorian utilitarian values of money-making, scientific truth and technological progress. At times, the artist switches from lashing irony to bitter complaint against the official system which tortures and deforms the individual by imposing unnecessary inhumane rules on him.

Wilde's adhesion to the Decadent Movement and dandyism is intended to constitute a more radical critique of the official discourse. The Decadence employs subversive techniques of mimicry and self-ironic representation, and thus brings an anti-essentialist critique to the Victorian system, considered to be stable and characterized by a hierarchal disposition of values and institutional forms within the discourse of power. In exchange, it puts forth ex-centric forms of self-expression, among which the most representative is that of the dandy.

In the same way as the Postmodernism—another deconstructive movement—the Decadence reveals the desire to revert the moral traditional code while reaffirming its values. To this end, it relies on mimicry, as the latter is an artistic technique with an important subverting potential through its aspects of ironic imitation and camouflage. In the *Decay of Lying*, Wilde had already assumed that “imitation can be made the sincerest form of insult” (Collins 1086).

Homi Bhabha underlines the undermining effect of mimicry on the authority of the colonial discourse:

Within that conflictual economy of colonial discourse the demand for identity, stasis—and the counterpressure of the diachrony of history - change, difference - mimicry represents an ironic compromise. Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite. The discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence....: mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. Mimicry is, thus the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualizes power. (85)

Wilde found in dandyism a duplicitous strategy of self-empowerment, revealed in his adopting and rejecting at the same time the conventions of the Victorian society. He used it to reinvent himself in its image through a process of artistic masquerade, taking over its shallow discourse, its false appearances and its clichés, as the Dandy reflected on a magnified scale the image of a narcissistic society enamored with its own vices. Perceived as an eccentric element of the Victorian social system, the dandy cultivated an ambiguous relation with the society he contested, but which he ironically mimicked. Since “mimicry repeats rather than represents” (Bhaba 88), what emerges is a particular mode of representation “a *writing*... that marginalizes the monumentality of history, mocks its power to be a model, that power which supposedly makes it imitable” (Bhaba 87). Bhabha further explains the destabilizing action of mimicry upon the discourse of authority:

The desire to emerge as 'authentic' thorough mimicry—through a process of writing and repetition—is the final irony of partial representation. *The menace* of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority. ...a discourse uttered between the lines and as such both against the rules and within them. The question of the representation of difference is always also a problem of authority. (88-89)

Wilde added a further twist to the queer personage; thus, the educated dandy who inhabits most of his narratives, stands for a different authoritative figure speaking on behalf of aesthetics. He embodies the new type of philosopher and critic, a lord of the word able to remake the world in his own image by his perfect mastering of the verbal means and by his empathy with all moods and modes of life. Lord Goring's descriptions in the first and third act of *The Ideal Husband* seem to epitomize the ideal artist in Wilde's view. The note of infatuation expressed by Wilde's clear identification with his probably most-accomplished personage is softened, however, by the self-mocking treatment:

A well-bred, expressionless face. He is clever, but would not like to be thought so. A flawless dandy, he would be annoyed if he were considered romantic. He plays with life, and is on perfectly good terms with the world. He is fond of being misunderstood. It gives him a post of vantage... Enter Lord Goring in evening dress with a buttonhole. He is wearing a silk hat and an Inverness cape. White-gloved, he carries a Louis Seize cane. His are all the delicate fopperies of fashion. One sees that he stands in immediate relation to modern life, makes it indeed, and so masters it. He is the first well-dressed philosopher in the history of thought. (Collins 521 -522)

It is only natural that the dandy should be the main exponent of both social and cultural rebellion in his writings, passing paradoxical sentences on art and life. In *The Importance of Being Earnest* and the two dialogues from *Intentions* he takes against Victorian educational institutions—the English Universities—presumably acknowledged as major centers of knowledge and progress in the British Empire; he refers to tutors and professors in a way that leaves no room for possible self-identification with the English type of scholar. He would go so far as to declare that “In examinations the foolish ask questions that the wise cannot answer” (Collins 1245). Similar opinions are expressed throughout his plays, as he strives to show that frequenting the society of the over-educated represents the major impediment that a talented young liar has to face in his artistic development; moreover, the educative schemes imposed by institutionalized forms of schooling were deemed to be suppressive in terms of personality and destructive for intellect since “nothing that is worth knowing can be taught” (Collins 1242).

By contrast, Wilde promotes an ideal artist as a cultured liar defined in terms that challenge and mock the scholar type issued from the Victorian educational institutions. In *The Decay of Lying*, Vivian, one of the characters that seems to utter Wilde's intentions, complains that

Many a young man starts in life with a natural gift for exaggeration which, if nurtured in congenial and sympathetic surroundings, or by imitation of the best models, might grow into something really great and wonderful. But, as a rule, he comes to nothing. [...] He either falls into careless habits of accuracy, or takes to frequenting the society of the aged and the well-informed. [...] and in a short time he develops a morbid and unhealthy faculty of truth-telling, begins to verify all statements made in his presence, has no hesitation in contradicting people who are much younger than himself, and often ends by writing novels which are so life-like that no one can possibly believe in their probability. (Collins 1073)

Through this comment, Wilde commits a first major transvaluation of the ethical and educational demands of the Victorian society, destabilizing the generally cherished values of truth and earnestness, as “truth-telling” is depicted as a morbid faculty. Instead, he asserts that the true ideal of man—self-culture—can only be attained by self-education, through the constant contact with the arts that touch, not with those that teach, and above all, through avoiding the company of the over-educated who, spending their lives trying to educate others, never have any time to educate themselves. To Wilde, even attending universities does not actually help people self-improve because it rather feeds their vanity than their intellectual needs. Kiberd observes that

Wilde distinguished between education which should cultivate the individual, and schooling, which suppresses the individual in a process of socialization. The university extension scheme attended by Gwendolen is an example of the latter: Gwendolen cannot come away without having been “excessively admired.” Academics themselves are hardly more honorable, for, according to Wilde, in examinations the foolish ask questions which the wise cannot answer. (283)

The light conversationalist tone of his manner plays is meant to contradict the heavy scientific jargon of the age; the psychological levity of characters and situations and the apparent facility with which certain disturbing truths are yielded offer a nimble critique against the seriousness and weight of the Victorian rationalized discourse.

Wilde’s employment and promotion of strong-willed, smart and independent female characters is another manner of challenging the Victorian self-assumed respectability and order. With few exceptions, the feminine characters in his plays are defiantly manly in their attitudes not hesitating to make decisions and follow them with strong determination. For instance, Gwendolen decides to skip her courses at the university and to follow Jack—whom she believed to be Ernest—in the countryside, Cecily firmly conducts her romance with Algernon on her own terms, Lady Bracknell manipulates her husband, bribes her maid, traces her daughter, and opposes firmly what she considers to be an inappropriate marriage. Wilde’s feminine characters overtly manipulate their masculine counterparts having no scruples in imposing their views and will upon them. They are superior to men by imagination and through their art of lying, through which they force reality to conform to their fictions. Equally strong and manipulative, evincing masculine determination under their manipulative schemes are Mrs. Erynn and Mrs. Cheveley, who exploit the frailties of the British establishment by faked conformism or fraudulent use of its laws, challenging Victorian society’s views, patriarchal values and legally-imposed gender roles.

Kiberd notices how the reversal of male-female roles in Wilde’s plays reflected the author’s rejection of English Victorians’ demands of specialization and assignment of defined social roles to both men and women:

Wilde’s art as well as his public persona, was founded on a critique of the manic Victorian urge to antithesis, an antithesis not only between all things English and Irish, but also between male and female, master and servant, good and evil, and so on. ...Wilde always wanted to create manly women and womanly men, as a challenge to the stratified thinking of his day. (13)

It is, however, in *Salomé*, the most exotic and symbolist of his plays, that the author manages to fully shatter and transgress both natural gender and national borders, as he takes over a biblical story in order to rewrite it in a decadent key, in a different language and in a different literary genre—drama.

Written in French and subsequently translated into English by Lord Alfred Douglas, *Salomé* is an eclectic text that has little in common with the biblical story which inspired it; the setting is the Decadent court of King Herod—a play character which mingles the three historical Herods with a tinge of Wilde himself. The place is described in terms of a melting pot of nationalities as Syrians, Nubians, Cappadocians, Jews, Nazarenes and Romans cohabit in an almost multicultural environment. However, Wilde’s intention is not to pinpoint enriching cultural differences, but rather to undermine them by levelling one against the other.

He employs Salomé, another important figure of Decadence as *Femme Fatale*, in order to challenge the common prejudices and assumptions of Victorian society, and explores the link between Eros and Thanatos, sexual desire and death, in a subverting way that shows how sexual identity and gender awareness are achieved at the expense of the other. Thus, Salomé expresses her desire for Iokaanan, a personage that appears very remote from the biblical prophet announcing the Kingdom of Heaven, in terms that the Victorians deemed to be appropriate and acceptable only to a male subject. It is one more

critique targeted at the Victorian views on woman and sexuality, which excelled in prudishness and hypocrisy. A scandal in its own through the discourse and ideas promoted, the play was however forbidden from representation in Wilde's time on account of its dealing with a biblical theme.

In a letter addressed to W.E. Henley in December 1888, Wilde recognized that in order "to learn how to write English prose I have studied the prose of France." He passionately declared "Flaubert is my master, and when I get on with my translation of the *Tentation* I shall be Flaubert II, *Roi par grâce de Dieu*, and I hope *something else beyond* (underlining mine)" (CL 372). But just a few days later, he would write to the same addressee "Flaubert did not write French prose, but the prose of a great artist happened to be French." This view would be reflected in his decision to write *Salomé* in French, which may similarly be read as the drama of a great artist who happened to be English.

Conclusions

With Wilde, therefore, identity, whether ethnic, cultural or sexual, would be constructed by exploiting and collapsing the categorial oppositions involved in both genre and gender. Most of his writings are hybrid forms conflating features belonging to different literary genres as they abound in cultural allusions, self-quotations and intertextuality. Wilde's complex multiform personality emerged, as a result of a conscious process of self-effacement and self-invention in which he strove to collapse and even reverse the taxonomy of current social, cultural and ethical norms. In a letter to Edmond de Goncourt he acknowledged his own complex linguistic and cultural condition: "Français de sympathie, je suis Irlandais de race et les Anglais m'ont condamné à parler la langue de Shakespeare" (CL 505).

Through his debunking approach to classical and biblical topics, through the subversive employment of feminine characters and beautiful young boys, last but not least, through his experimenting with foreign languages and alien cultural spaces, Wilde seems to have prefigured the modern transnational type of literature, in which James Joyce, one of his conationals, excelled and the transculturalism emerging from the more and more globalized societies of today.

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Constructing Armân/Vlach Ethnic Identity

Abstract: Constructing identity (ethnicity, in this case) is subject to the action of several elements shaping the complex relationships between the individual and the communities of which he/she is a member, with direct and indirect effects: the SELF (beliefs, awareness) about himself; others about the SELF; institutional (official) statements about the SELF; (statements of) the SELF about himself to others. Linguistics and cultural and social anthropology are sometimes in contradiction in defining identity, as loyalty towards ethnicity does not exclude differences in national affiliation.

I will analyse the identity as a complex of perspectives and assertions, starting from a corpus of data (gathered from my previous research) and from the related bibliography, trying to sort out my hypothesis of the four perspectives on identity.

The present study tries to answer, from a linguistic perspective, the questions whether the geolinguistic approach is sufficient in order to define ethnic identity, and if its limitations, as shown in the bibliography (from Gustav Weigand's field research in late 19th century to Thede Kahl's in the early 21st century) can be surpassed.

Keywords: ethnic identity, self-identity, external perception, national affiliation, Armân/Vlach cultural and ethnic identity.

Introduction: Useful Short Definitions

To start with a general assertion, ethnic identity or ethnicity is one of the individual social identities (Appiah "Stereotypes" 43), along with race, gender, class, sexuality and religious affiliation. Ethnic identity is a result of several variables, and the central one is the family, its ancestral origins, its cultural behavior. If ethnic identity is a given dimension, generated by birth and family, national identity is an historical and ideological construct, or an *artifact* (Bara "Criza") and the object of the affiliation.

The Four Layers of Ethnic Identity

This approach to the question of ethnic and cultural identity is relatively new and still in need of theoretical research. Most of the contributions in this field take for granted the ethnic identity as a given block of markers and discuss further aspects, such as kinship, community memory, traditions, minority issues, cultural markers, et cetera.

In his lecture given at Cambridge University, Appiah ("The State" 241 sq.) distinguishes, under the title "Individuality and Identity," between "three core elements" of the existence of social identities that are raising "questions for ethics and politics":

*"the **typical label** for a group," a consensus usually organized around a set of stereotypes, regarding what the typical members of a group "are like, how they behave, how they may be detected";

*"the **internalization** of those labels," as parts of individual identity;

*"the **treatment**" of an individual as part of the group, that leads to discrimination.

In a prospective text, Caragiu Marioțeanu ("Aromânii" 2001) tried to explain the difference between identity, identification, and legitimation, as follows: "Este limpede însă că identitatea, conștiința de sine, și identificarea, recunoașterea de către alții a identității nu sunt, totuși, suficiente: este nevoie de o legitimize a acestora. [It is obvious, however, that identity, self-awareness, and identification, the

recognition of one's identity by others, are not sufficient: they are in need of legitimization.] (translation mine)."

From this text, we can understand that legitimization is the institutional step, the state authority voice and power position regarding a given ethnic group (and his language). In her previous text (Caragiu Marioțeanu, "Identitate" 1998), the author detailed the opposition *identity / identification*.

From the corpus of data and my previous research on the ethnic identity, I may advance the hypothesis that there are at least four embodiments or four layers of ethnic identity. As they are intricate and many times entangled, it is really difficult to choose the order of their presentation. It could start from the individual perspective or from the institutional perspective. It could start from the empirical experience or from the scientific or political one. The fact is that ethnic identity is a complex and multi-faceted psychosocial phenomenon.

The "actors" of this phenomenon are, from the concrete to the abstract: the individual, the ethnic group, the society (the nation), and the science as a repertoire of codified knowledge. The relationships between the four actors are complex as well.

The individual is raised and socialized in a family, in a small group of relatives and gradually in his/her life he/she is exposed to larger groups and communities. The family, considering the most traditional pattern of parents and grandparents, expresses ethnic features (beginning with the language of everyday communication, the process of language acquisition by the child) in a tacit way and transmits (implicitly) cultural markers, ways of acting, behaviors, attitudes, through assertions and evaluations. The family explains to the child and establishes for his benefit the border between "us" and "the others," between the internal world of the house and the outside.

At this level, the ethnic identification is acquired by the child in a comprehensive and implicit manner, not through a discourse about social, cultural or ethnic divisions and borders.

Nevertheless, at the same time, the behavior of individuals and groups is the vehicle of observable and quantifiable markers. Their world is subject to comparison, analysis, classification and codification from a point of view, be it empirical or scientific. Their world, their everyday life is therefore the object of reflection.

Combining those two perspectives, the levels of the existence *in se* and the level of observation and reflection, I prefer to list the four embodiments of the ethnic identity as follows:

- (a) the codified **assertion** of the existence of an ethnic group among other ethnic groups;
- (b) the **perception** (direct and indirect; empirical and official, scientific, political et cetera) of others about a specific ethnic group and about an individual as member of that group;
- (c) the **self-identity**, through socialization (i.e. beliefs, awareness about himself) as being a member of a specific ethnic group
- (d) the **statement** of an individual about himself as a member of an ethnic and/or national group, his **declared affiliation** to a group.

In other words, there is (a) a specific **X** ethnic identity **given** by various factors and markers and **asserted** by insiders and outsiders as well. We can refer to this X as to an objective entity, described and defined, that is real and existing, confirmed by empirical experience and known and recognizable in a spread area. This identity is known by those who are sharing it in an innate manner, and also by those who are not sharing it, but have in different ways the possibility to assist to it, to see it or to learn, hear, be informed about it.

This **X** identity existed prior to its codification and could be (b) experienced, perceived first by people living or traveling in some geographical areas, and, then, by researchers interested to analyze and describe it. All these people contribute to **elaborate the knowledge about X**. They are outsiders (even if some

researchers might be insiders). This knowledge is a descriptive one, most of the time a list of markers, a repertoire of facts about X as a group, with statistical information about the number of individuals pertaining to X. This knowledge is deposited in bibliographies and sometimes it is the unique tool for further studies.

But the **X** identity is a living reality (**c**) and individuals belonging to this group are aware of their differences, as they, too, are constantly experiencing different encounters with other groups and individuals. From the differences they notice, they are, too, building knowledge about themselves and about the others.

For different reasons, in specific social, historical conditions, this X identity (**d**) might be asserted or concealed. This action is known also as identification, or affiliation. The real clash between ethnic identities occurs where local/ethnic identity is included in the broad/national identity.

A Description of the Four Layers

a. The Codified Assertion or the Relationship between the (Ethnic) Name and the (Ethnic) Identity

The codified assertion is a LABEL (Appiah, "The State" 241). The world population is described and known as being divided in ethnic groups, be them in present days nations organized in states, or simply people or nations without a state. It is obvious that this political category—the state—influences the view about ethnic groups. Meanwhile, ethnic groups are attested earlier than the age of states.

Each identity assertion or distinction begins with its name. In the present case, we encounter a double-faced situation and a profusion of names:

(a) Insiders designate themselves with one and the same name, despite the large geographical area they live in, or the elapsed period of time.

Armân/Râmân is the name given by insiders, by Armâns themselves, and it is considered the ethnonym or ethnic name in their language. The word comes from the Latin *romanus*, meaning *citizen of Rome*. Despite the large area where they have lived in the Balkans for over two thousand years, they have always designated themselves as Armân^ũ (sg.) Armânj (pl.), and their language as *armânească*, *armâneashti*.

(b) This ethnic group is known and designated by outsiders in different ways: **Aromunen, Arumanian, Arvanitovlah, Choban, Karagun, Kutsovlah, Macedo-Romanian, Megalovlah, Tsintsar, Vlah, Vlasi**.

What is changing from name to name is the perspective or the ideological charge: **Aromunen, Arumanian, Macedo-Romanian** are created terms, translated from Romanian, to stress the point that this ethnic group is a part, a branch of the larger group or the Northern-Danube Romanians. Those theories can be traced back to mid-19th century.

Arvanitovlah, Kutsovlah, Megalovlah, Vlah are current terms in Greek, which underline the fact that this ethnic group is of a Latin origin, living in current Albania, in medieval Megalovlahia (Epirus, Pindus Mountains, Thessaly), or having a surname not yet explained in a satisfactory way.

Vlasi is the correspondent of the Greek **Vlah** in southern Slavic languages.

Choban, Karagun, Tsintsar are not focused on the ethnic description, but rather on the traditional occupation (*shepherd*), on the main piece of traditional ware (*black gown/gouna*), or to an unexplained feature (maybe the frequency of "ts" in their language, or maybe a remainder of their Latin origin: *Caesar's sons*).

It is very curious that Weigand's terminology was not used in Romanian studies and, moreover, it is almost hidden, since his book from 1894 is not yet translated into Romanian. In his introduction to this book, Weigand explains the term **Aromunen** in the very title of his monograph as the people (germ. *Volk*)

known also as Makedo-Romanen, so as *Romans* from Macedonia, and not at all as *Rumänen* from Macedonia, as the other Romanian scholars do. In 1907, Weigand makes the distinction between *rumänen* and *aromunen* from the title. This last work, too, is almost unknown and unregistered in Armân studies in Romania.

A Romanian traveler and writer, Nenițescu, published in 1885 his *De la Românii din Turcia europeană: studiu etnic și statistic asupra Armânilor*. Although the original title (and the entire text) used the term **Armâni**, his book is always given in bibliographies with the term **Aromâni** (as if Nenițescu was wrong and must be corrected...).

The only study ever using **Armân** as an ethnic name is Fatse in 1984, due to her position, as an outsider of the Romanian scientific environment and the national ideology. Consequently, she was free of old theories and constraints to use the proper name of this Latin speaking people.

In conclusion, it is obvious that no matter what name is used, it is typically the one and the same group that all those terms refer to.

b. The External Perception

Daily experiences of people living in the Balkans have led to the global characteristics attributed to each ethnic group. Prior to ethnological or anthropological studies, rooted in the 19th century, written testimonies about ethnic groups had registered the Vlachs, as Byzantines chronicles and other documents, since the 10th century.

From these early sources, the identity of Vlachs/Armâni is already established as sheep breeders and consequently as an ethnic group living upon a milk and wool industry economy, upon goods transportation by caravans. This image tends to prevail and to become a stereotype, despite the fact that in urban centers Armân traders, golden and silver smiths or tailors were active.

There is a question often expressed in simple (and naïve) terms as: define in two words a given ethnic group. The certainty and the predictability of a short answer are neither proved nor reliable. The reason is that values and identity markers could not be regarded as shared equally by all members of a community or at different moments of history. Identity, even in the external perception, is flexible and changing.

In a relatively recent text, published online, Irina Nicolau escapes the rigors of a scientific text and builds an essay, where for her, asked many times to define in two words this ethnic group, the external perception about Armâni is condensed in two words: “durere și splendoare,” “un necuprins paradox.” In English: “suffering and splendor,” “an extended / incomprehensible paradox.” After this poignant statement, she tries to enumerate the repeated classical traits about this group and reformulates the glorifying stereotype, current in the Romanian studies: courage, solidarity, friendship, family.

Nevertheless, referring to the contemporary Armâni, Irina Nicolau identifies them through two features: the names and the language. This is, in fact, the new frame of life, where the traditional outfit and the specific appearance are already replaced by a modern and relatively uniform, globalized fashion.

The anthropologist Vassilis Nitsiakos, a Vlach himself, approaches the subject with more subtlety and identifies, during his scientific journey through Southern Albania, old Vlach people through their appearance and posture. He is aware of these features given his own memory and knowledge about Vlach people.

Other external perceptions given by travelers were registered (see Tega 1998).

c. The (Inner) Self Identity

This facet regards the ethnic element composing the self-identity (at the individual level). Through early socialization in family, the individual will receive diffuse information about himself as member of a specific ethnic group. He/she will participate in family events, will acquire a specific language, will assist at conversations and will be subjected to specific norms of conduct.

Depending on the type of the larger community, he/she will discover the differences or similarities between his/her family and other families. The children will become aware of those cultural markers and of the relating attitudes. It is also possible that the child will not receive the specific information directly, in cases where the family is hoping to assimilate to the broad community (i.e. the immigrants).

As Schwandner-Sievers ("The Albanian") demonstrates, and at the time of her research—the year 2000—: "Aromanians or Vlachs define themselves as a people, basing ideas of ethnic or cultural cohesion on criteria of language, religion, descent, common history and former socio-professional specialization."

Although this definition includes five criteria, the last one is more or less obsolete, given the dynamics of economic life, but it is still operating if related to family history or the community memory of ethnic identity.

And here it is the main point of the Armân question: if language is the first sign of identity, how could one be Armân without knowing the language? The study of the Armân language and culture are under debate, mostly because of its so-called lack of utility. But there is also another point of view, expressed by the cultural associations: studying a language and a culture is enabling the human being with new tools and new horizons.

The question of language (mother tongue) preservation and shift is connected with self-identity. The complexity of shaping self-identity upon the language acquisition is reflected by a modern diversity of cases, including the mixed marriages, which are more frequent nowadays than in the first half of the 20th century. For this reason, language remains a strong identity marker, but not the only one.

The last 20 years have permitted, due to political events and freedom of expression and circulation in most Balkan countries, the Armân culture a great revival, illustrated mainly in literature. Written sources (books, journals, reports) and my numerous journeys in areas where Armân people live, my conversations with many of them helped me realize that, despite the lack of formal education in Armân mother tongue, the nucleus of Armân language, its basic vocabulary is still homogenous and we can communicate using this language. I became aware, even if today the traditional socio-economic life has been replaced with modern ways of life, of a real Armân cultural and ethnic identity.

We meet at scientific events, at folklore festivals, at poetry contests taking place in the Balkan countries, and we discover that our cultural and ethnic identity is still strong.

d. The Personal Statement about the National Affiliation and the National Identity Policies

Nonetheless, despite this given ethnic identity, we have to distinguish further between two or more trends in Armân self-identification or national affiliation.

In various occasions, conditions and external pressures, an individual, member of a small or powerless ethnic group could express about himself, about his ethnic identity, two types of statements:

- (a) faithful to his self-ethnic identity, builds as a member of a given ethnic group
- (b) wishes to affiliate to a larger or powerful group

This is the problem of self-identification. As Lazarou notices, most Vlachs have considered themselves Hellenes, at the national level of their identity—and this since at least 1820—but at the same time they have also known they were Vlachs, at the ethnic level. Fewer have considered themselves Romanians, especially after the opening of Romanian supported schools (Tanașoca). It is still unclear if those, and only those, declaring themselves Romanians, have migrated to Romania after 1925, because the historical and economic conditions were complex. More than half of the migrant families came from Bulgaria (Bara, Cușa, Saramandu, Tușa), and less than half from Northern Greece, the remaining from Serbia and Albania. In the Cadrilater region of Romania, where they had been colonized, the Vlachs/Armâni continued to sing in their traditional way, half their songs being in Greek and half in *armâneashti* (Paul H. Stahl, personal

communication). The Vlachs colonized in Cadrilater received the naturalization and the Romanian citizenship only ten years after their arrival.

In earlier centuries, since the 16th century, the Armân merchants traveling and trading in the North of the Danube Principalities had had continuous contacts with Romanian people (known as Wallachians and Moldavians at that time) and their language. In spite of the long periods of time they had spent here, they never expressed the idea of similarity or identity, language or customs with the Armân people. These merchants simply declared themselves, and were known, as Greeks (they were speaking and writing in Greek).

In other countries, as well, we can find similar examples. It is known that in Vienna and in Buda and Pest, the Greek communities and churches included also Vlachs, among them Michael Bojadschi, the author of the first Armân Grammar (Vienna, 1813). About 1825, when Vlachs/Armâns came in the modern cities of South Bulgaria, as Peshtera, for instance, they were registered in official documents with their Greek ethnic name: Koutsovlachs. They built a church and opened a Greek school. These facts are registered in the archives of the church they built and were reported in September 2003, by the Bulgarian priest of Peshtera, to a group of Armân visitors.

The distinction between the so-called inner identity and the option, the affiliation to another identity, is implicated in Ornea's comments: they are now Romanians *by option*. Nitsiakos is clearer about this distinction, as he is following the development of a supra ordinate entity, the *national* identity, which includes several *ethnic* identities, in the forging of the Greek national state.

In the Balkans, peoples were confronted in the 20th century with a demographic policy that generated movements and shifts along the new borders, designed by the new nation states in order to secure their ethnic homogeneity. For the purpose of this study, it must be said that since 1926, some 30,000 Armâns from Greece, Bulgaria, Albania and Serbia have decided to expatriate themselves and migrate to Romania. Scholars begin to claim that in the actual condition of the Armâni, their identity is no longer the same in all countries, that time and local context have irreversibly changed the old cultural and ethnic unity and solidarity. Although it is true, we still notice many features still resist, they are common as identity markers.

Without using the term of *affiliation*, Kahl ("The Ethnicity" 2002) explores the phenomenon of Armân/Vlach *ethnicity* (Ethnizität) after 1990. He finds seven types of identification: pure Armân, Greek, Romanian, other Balkan identity, local one, indifference, double identity. The analysis of every situation (national, political, historical, personal) will be used to account for this variety of assessments.

In fact, a split in the traditional national (Hellene) affiliation has occurred since mid- 19th century, when Romania opened and supported elementary and high schools in the Ottoman provinces of Macedonia and the Epirus area, high schools that were later closed in mid—20th century. The cleavage between two main national affiliations (Hellene and Romanian) has strongly affected the unity of the communities and the identification of the Armân people: only a thin segment was gained for the pro-Romanian identity, and the rest felt Hellene and sent their children to Greek language schools (see also Hâciu, "Aromânii" 600-601). This cleavage has operated and is still noticeable in Albania, even in the opposite choices asserted by members of the same family: one child to the Greek school, another to the Romanian school (see Schwandner-Sievers "The Albanian" - 2000).

Quoted by Gica ("The Recent History" 2011): "Aromanians who wanted to progress in professional careers would deny their Aromanian minority identity and identify as Macedonians so that their careers would not suffer," this could be read as a general assertion about the condition of Armâns in different national states.

Is the Geolinguistic Approach Able to Define Ethnic Identity?

Vlach individuals are affiliated as persons with one of the national identities given by the state they live in. About the Hellene (not simply Greek) national identity and self-identification, see Nitsiakos (*On the Border* 144-145). The anthropological approach is far more complex and takes into consideration various variables of the ethnic identity.

There is, for the observer on the field, a frame in which this identity manifests itself and can be perceived. Language is one of the elements, but as individuals are differently socialized and educated, the linguistic dimension is differently relevant for different generations. As Nitsiakos testimonies for a three-generation family in Albania, the oldest person, the grandmother Quiratsë, is a Vlach with all the recognizable identity features (appearance, face, black clothes and scarf), the middle-aged person, her son Gjergj is "aware of his Vlach origin" [both parents], but "accepted" however "his assimilation into the Albanian society." "He is a typical Albanian," as his appearance, ways of behavior, expression, and consciousness show (Nitsiakos 142). Born and educated after the fall of the communist regime, Gjergj's son expresses a powerful affiliation with the Hellene national identity and wishes to study in Greek.

Such examples could be extracted from a variety of publications and informal conversations between members of the Vlach communities, and they were already present in the 19th century, as Weigand (*Die Aromunen* 1894) registered in Monastir (today called Bitolia): the lady of the house where the author was invited spoke an elegant Greek language, one of his sons German (he was studying in Germany), the other in English (he was studying in Constantinople), but her daughters spoke in Vlach, and the servants in Bulgarian. In other circumstances, Weigand recognizes the Vlach people by their appearance, their behavior, the shape and the brightness of their eyes. Weigand underlines that neither the language, nor the dress, are always identity markers.

The fact that the fourth layer of the identity is the result of the option, of the affiliation with a national identity, is illustrated also by Trifon (*Les Aroumains* 2005): the sons of a Vlach mother may choose different affiliations.

From my own experience (as a member of the Vlach community) and from the related bibliography, I identified (Bara, "On the Armân" 2004) some markers that are stronger than the language, nowadays in a process of abandonment.

In my view, Armân/Vlach cultural identity is based upon a series of distinctive elements, material (culinary products, wool artefacts, family photos) and immaterial (songs, dances, Christian names and kin names, kinship and family memories, matrimonial rules, wedding ceremony, other feast-related traditions).

From the list I have previously given (Bara, "On the Armân" 2004), I will retain here a few specialties. *Tărhănă* [home-made pasta in the form of small round crumbs, boiled in milk], still manufactured by old Vlach women, but also prepared by specialized undertakings in Greece. *Peturi* [thin, home-made flat noodles boiled in milk]. *Plătsintă* [wedding ritual sweet pastry from wheat and corn flour, sugar and boiled oil]. *Păstrămă* [sheep or goat pastrami]. *Căvărmă* [boiled sheep meat conserved in solid fat]. *Piperki cu cashu* [fried peppers with cheese]. *Pita* [salted pastry filled with cheese or leek]. Cooking traditional specialties is still an important part of family and community tradition.

Onomastics is also a relevant element for the Armân identity: *male Christian names* (Cola, Coli, Costa, Dima, Dina, Yioryi, Hrista, Iani/Yeani, Iota, Lifteri, Miha, Mina, Mita, Nicea, Santa, Steryiu, Stila, Tegha, Zica, Zisa) and *female Christian names* (Aghora, Athina, Ciona, Dhafa, Despa, Evanthia, Hrisa, Hrisula, Iana/Yeana, Ianula/Yeanula, Kiratsa, Lena, Limbeada, Mara, Marusha, Mica, Musha, Pepa, Roidha, Shana, Sirma, Sultana, Stiryeana, Tana, Vanghea, Vanghilitsa, Zoi, Zora, Zuitsa).

Family names are also characteristic (see also Nitsiakos 398). There are specific prefixes for names: *cara-* (Caraiani, Caramaci, Caragiu, Carafoli), *hagi-* (Hagi, Hagi-Duli, Hagivreta), *papa-* (Papacostea, Papahagi, Papanace, Papasteryiu). Frequently family names are ending in *-a*: Bara, Barba, Bashtavela,

Beca, Beza, Bletsa, Caracota, Chihaia, Cucona, Cunia, Cuturela, Cuvata, Dima, Gica, Gioga, Goga, Guda, Mataranga, Pala, Paligora, Pasha, Piceava, Poala, Popnicola, Samara, Sima, Vrana, Zeana, Tega, Topa, Tsadila, Zapara, Zuca; *names ending in -i*: Balamaci, Becali, Dauti, Farmachi, Fuchi, Ghizari, Gioni, Godi, Koukoudi, Mandili, Padioti, Papari, Papazisi, Papuli, Perifani, Piti, Prefti, Samargi, Shoki, Stambuli, Vangheli, Vlahbei; and *names ending in -u*: Babu, Ciamitru, Docu, Iorgoveanu, Lazarou, Mantsu, Murnu, Pushuticu, Saramandu, Stavrositu, Tugearu, Veru.

As an effect of the assimilation policy, mainly in Bulgaria since the beginning of the 20th century, Armân first names have compulsory been turned into Bulgarian forms, such as: Shteryiu became Shterev, Damu became Damov, Kiurci became Kiurciev. During the Bulgarian occupation of the today's Republic of Macedonia, during the Second World War, the Armân last names were also turned into Bulgarian forms, such as: Costa became Kostov, Dima became Dimcev, Naum became Naumov, Mihali became Mihailov, Shteryiu became Shteriov. The second effect of this policy and of the complexity of modern life including exogamy, the Armân Christian names were abandoned in favor of the Slavic ones, such as: Branislav, Desislava, Goran, Gordana, Krasimira, Pero, Stoice.

In Romania, for the official identity documents delivered at the moment of their immigration (from 1926 until 1937), they were in many cases registered with Romanian *family names*, such as: Apostol, Costea, Gheorghe, Dumitru, Enache, Ionescu, Mihai, Nicolae, Tănase. For the *Christian names*, the first step in the 1930s was to switch from old Armân to modern Romanian ones: Aghora became Tudora, Stiryeana became Ștefania, Santa became Alexandru, Pepa became Petra, Iani became Ion, Ioan. The second step, in the 1970s, was to modernize the traditionally-given names conserving only the first letter: from grandfather Dima, Vasili to grandson Daniel, Valentin; from grandmother Aghora, Dhafa, Kiratsa, Sirma, Vanghea to grand-daughter Aurelia, Daniela, Ketty, Silvia, Valentina. In the stream of modernization, new names are also given, without any traditional motivation, such as: Cristina, Florentina, Mariana, Mihaela.

I must mention at this point a new trend in the 1990s, that of giving old Armân names, such as: Iani, Kira, Mara, Nicolas (Cola). Giving to their children those names, the young parents expressed their will to bond with their cultural identity, to praise their roots and to reflect their Vlach identity. It is also a way to create a familiar and recognizable reference for their families and for themselves.

However, despite the name occultation under Slavic or Romanian forms, the members of the Armân communities have the ability, reinforced and transmitted by group, to recognize and discover the Armân name behind the official one. You will hear often: *that is the official name, but this other is the Armân name*.

Conclusions

The play between the national, official identity and the inner, ethnic one, known by the members of the communities due to group memory, underlines the complexity of the identity question. This aspect is better understood by researchers who are insiders, able to establish a better communication and empathy with the members of the studied ethnic group.

Collective memory is a strong link between generations and between kinship members and it is cultivated in different ways: old stories told in formal (festive days, marriages, funerals or remembrance ceremonies, when the whole family is gathered) or informal contexts (any time home or where guests are invited), memory books (historical, autobiographical), genealogical explanations for the benefit of the younger people.

Coming from specific places in the Balkans, Armâns have migrated to Romania and still have there their relatives whom they can meet today in festivals or particular visits. They were colonized in the same localities in South Dobrogea. They were moved together in Northern Dobrogea in September 1940 when

the frontier between Bulgaria and Romania was redrawn. They were settled in the same area. They have passed through the same experiences under the communist rule, some of them being once again forced to move as politic detainees, with all the family, in specific areas with obligatory domicile for almost five years.

Consequently, I consider that those markers and the complexity of the identity issue escape the too narrow linguistically approach and that cultural and ethnic identity, in its flexibility and continuous negotiation, is rather the theme of anthropology.

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